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# N O E L

AN EPIC IN TEN CANTOS  
BY GILBERT CANNAN

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PART THREE

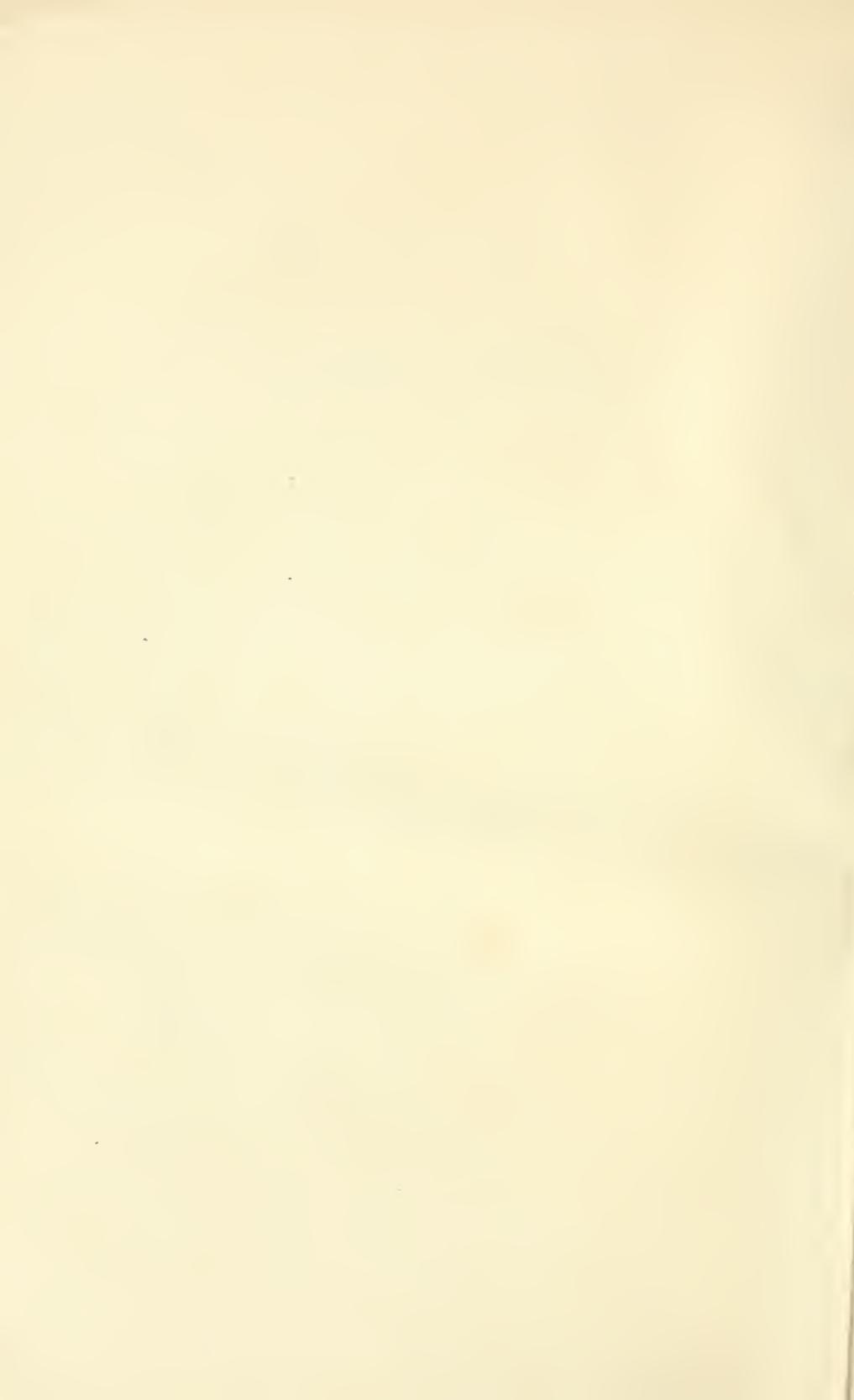
CANTOS III AND IV

LONDON  
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## CANTO THREE



### CANTO III

LONDON's my subject, London of the twilight  
Of gods and kings and empires and the causes  
For which men died in times before the dry light  
Of commerce withered life. My Muse here pauses,  
And dreads what London's gloom will do with my light.  
But I don't care. The maker of my laws is  
My conscience, and my Muse must stand with me  
To watch the years of dying liberty.

Dear Muse, I know you long to take a flight  
Above Parnassus on my poet's wings,  
And so you shall when through the dreadful night  
The dawn begins to peep and linnet sings  
The new-born day. But first I have to fight  
To cleanse my soul for what the new day brings.  
O may it bring some joy on hellish earth  
Where poets pine and bring no song to birth!

Katje had vanished. London was a tomb  
Walled in with laws and law-books for my hero,  
A dank and dark and dreary catacomb,  
Where pleasure kept his spirits down at zero,  
With tasteless work to aggravate his gloom,  
And no relief save Carton, Jones, Pinero,  
The ghostly drama of a ghostly time  
All virgin-white with boredom's wintry rime.

O Kensington, O Bayswater, O Jail,  
 Where all a nation's life and power are pent  
 In padded ease, where spirits faint and fail  
 And minds are drugged with so much increment  
 Of wealth that, like the blubber of a whale,  
 Keeps out the cold and in the discontent  
 Which raises human beings to the level  
 Where they're a match for life, God and the devil.

Polite the dinners, more polite the balls,  
 Polite the fashionable music played,  
 Polite the art, polite the hush that falls  
 As titled ladies tastefully arrayed  
 Arrive to dine or make their round of calls  
 And ply the scandal which is all their trade.  
 Polite their cunning and polite the skill  
 With which they push their husbands through the mill.

From stifling house to stifling house in clothes  
 Most elegant went Noel, though he knew  
 Not why. Upon his head a shiny hat, his toes  
 In shiny shoes, and gloves of dove-like hue  
 Upon his hands, and linen white as snows  
 Upon a mountain—Noel stood to view  
 A dandy, like a wild rose in a green-house.  
 The richest mansion seemed to him a mean house.

“This cannot last!” he gasped. “This cannot last!  
 This gross plum-pudding of a life must break.”  
 He saw how men and women were held fast  
 In keeping up appearance for the sake  
 Of keeping up appearance, till a blast  
 Of war or revolution should awake  
 The minds so dull, the souls so somnolent  
 In West End London comfortably pent.

They slept through war, they slumbered into peace  
 While men were slain to keep the drowsy spell  
 Unbroken and the ninety-nine years' lease  
 Of Privilege unmortgaged, though all hell  
 Should rise to bid such fatal stillness cease.  
 The stillness rippled as a pebble fell,  
 The stone of death which broke at last the seem,  
 What time the air thrilled with the muffled drum.

Ind. Imp. et Dei. Gra. Fid. Def. et Brit.  
 Omn. Reg. Victoria, like Mrs Jones  
 The washerwoman, had at last to fit  
 Into the end of all. She died. Her bones  
 Must mingle with the earth to make of it  
 New life to blossom from the barren stones.  
 She died at peace, the famous Peace Britannie  
 Imposed upon a universe voleanie.

She died at peace in sainted widowhood  
 As she had lived. Her Virtue was so rare  
 It hid all Evil in her realm, and Good  
 Had reigned supreme for sixty years. (Compare  
 Lord Tennyson with Shakespeare.) Virtue stood  
 A marble monument against the wear and tear  
 Of sixty years of squalid bargaining  
 To make an Empire in a wedding ring.

She died in peace, but she had been so old  
 So long that no one thought that she could die.  
 Queens live for ever in the stories told  
 To keep the gleam within a baby's eye.  
 Yet queens are women and they cannot hold  
 Their Virtue when the King of Death goes by.  
 O day of wrath! O days and nights of mourning!  
 Death for a moment stopped the people's yawning.

An old, old woman's body in a box  
 Is drawn through London's streets, and tier on tier  
 The people gape and gaze while Death unlocks  
 The prison-gates of Virtue and Austere  
 Morality, which made the spirit *Vox*  
*Et preterea nihil.* On the bier  
 Were drawn the keys of England's island prison  
 Whereon at last had Freedom's sun arisen.

The wan light of this long-belated dawn  
 Shone through the London murk upon a show  
 Unrivalled. From remotest earth were drawn  
 Into the trough of destiny (to throw  
 Their princeliness before the bourgeois yawn)—  
 Kings, emperors and rajahs, bending low  
 Their heads in grief before the death of royalty  
 Which also meant the obsequies of loyalty.

Sir Somerset and Noel in Whitehall,  
 Hard by the place where royal Charles was slain,  
 With mixed emotions watched the festival  
 Of Death, who drenches life with slanting rain.  
 Sir Somerset enjoyed the funeral  
 As such, but Noel's heart with sudden pain  
 Perceived the much that with the aged Queen  
 Went down and was as it had never been.

They saw the heaped-up rows of pallid faces,  
 The crowds fenced in with soldiers and police,  
 While all the human pageant slowly paces  
 In mourning for King Sailor Billy's niece.  
 Her grooms and lackeys, secretaries, *saises*,  
 All play their part in the romantic piece.  
 But if there was a hero of that day  
 'Twas Kaiser Wilhelm come his grief to pay.

The greatest actor on the human stage,  
 Self-hypnotised, could hypnotise the throng  
 To gaze in awe upon his equipage  
 And uniform, to marvel and to long  
 That this symbolic figure of the age  
 Should be its Knight to free the world from wrong.  
 A Parsifal was Wilhelm in his mail.  
 With such an audience he could not fail.

So Wilhelm's art out-Beerbohmed Beerbohm Tree.  
 Majestic, bowed, upon his steed he sat  
 A man of marble, mute humility  
 In royal grief. The proletariat  
 Had more than they had bargained for to see.  
 This marble monarch was worth gazing at.  
 Aye, every inch a king, a dramatist,  
 Theatrical emotions and mailed fist.

O Kaiser, Kaiser Wilhelm, did you dream  
 That all your glory slipped into the tomb  
 With grandmamma, and as she died the gleam  
 Of liberty shot through her kingdom's gloom,  
 And all the eager hopes that ever teem  
 In human thought had ripened in the womb  
 Of Time. O Kaiser, you were riding to  
 Your grave that day although you little knew.

Salute the ages dead, the gathered treasure  
 Nailed up in a box. Salute the grave  
 Now dug to hold the ancient world whose measure  
 At last is taken when no power can save  
 It from the lust grown from its cult of pleasure,  
 Which set at naught the sainted and the brave.  
 Salute the nineteenth century whose whoredom  
 Had gathered up a thousand ages' boredom.

Disgust and pity choked up Noel's breast  
 To see so many thousands mourn for one,  
 That one a symbol of the pious zest  
 With which so many villainies were done  
 By Palmerston and Dizzy and the rest  
 Who found in Empire their religion  
 And used the widowed Virtue of the Queen  
 To keep the greenhorn British public green.

Disgust and pity irked him till he felt  
 This was the end, the end made visible  
 Of all the secret woe that Empire spelt  
 For nameless millions burning in the hell  
 Of their docility. And as the veldt  
 Had swallowed up the lives of those who fell  
 To bring forth gold, so here in England death  
 Had ta'en the power that robbed them of their breath.

His thoughts now hovered round the central figure,  
 The Kaiser Wilhelm, and there seemed to grow  
 An aureole that made him still loom bigger.  
 Symbolical and superhuman. So  
 He rode towards the grave that Death, the digger,  
 Had made for him and all his tribe to know,  
 The tinsel ending of a golden dream  
 Destroyed by Life where things are what they seem.

This drapery of death was so appalling  
 To Noel that his world came crashing down,  
 And with a dizzy sense of swiftly falling  
 He felt that in the sea of life must drown  
 His dearest hopes, since there was no forestalling  
 The tragedy that hung o'er London Town.  
 The muffled drums and grunting bands went by  
 Bemoaning more than fallen majesty.

“With Virtue dead, then Love is dead, and dead  
 Is Fancy.” Such strange words as these took shape  
 And knocked upon his emptied heart, and said  
 In whispers, as his mind began to gape  
 And crack beneath the pressure of his dread,  
 “So lovelessly died Tarquin for his rape.”  
 Such twisted thoughts took shape within his brain  
 As aged him years within a moment’s pain.

But in that moment clear as dewdrop in  
 A buttercup his thought within his soul  
 Became a dream that sped his heart to win  
 The grace that was his nature’s destined goal,  
 The grace that triumphs nobly over sin  
 In suffering, and gives no petty toll  
 To smug morality whose right and wrong  
 Squeeze human hearts and break in them their song.

The Kaiser dwindled into something less  
 Than man. The potentates and rajahs grew  
 Downwards to dwarfish heights. The throng and press  
 Expanded and cast off its sable hue  
 To blaze in colour as its souls address  
 Themselves to grace their lost life to renew.  
 The pomp of royalty goes down to dust,  
 The people’s soul shakes off its age-long rust.

And Noel knew that no one knew but he  
 The miracle enkindling all humanity  
 Now it had broken with the century  
 Which gloried in its virtuous inanity,  
 Its hypocritic cult of liberty,  
 But held the people slaves to its urbanity  
 And substituted for the Christian myth  
 The economic rules of Adam Smith.

Sir Somerset remarked that it was time  
 To eat, and Noel's dewdrop vision faded,  
 And left him slipping back into the slime  
 Of London life, in work and pleasure jaded,—  
 Unpromising material for rhyme,  
 So thoroughly was human life degraded  
 To appetites and senses, and no more  
 With mind and soul left hungering and sore.

“ My boy,” said old Sir Somerset, “ the King  
 Will stir us up and we shall have a Court  
 That will not slay our pleasures on the wing.”  
 And Noel nodded gloomily. That sort  
 Of leering hope was most unpromising  
 To him who saw in Britain now a fort  
 Where Liberty at last would be defended,  
 Now that the day of kings and priests was ended.

Sir Somerset that day had caught a cold.  
 His homage to the Age Victorian  
 Cost him his life. No more would he unfold  
 To Briton, Brahmin and West Indian  
 The mysteries of tort or copyhold,  
 No more be marked as the most learned man  
 About the Temple or the Law Courts. He  
 Left Noel as his only legatee,

A house in Kensington, a shooting box  
 In Scotland, slum property in Leeds,  
 A hundred thousand pounds in divers stocks  
 And shares, rooms full of books and screeds  
 Of manuscripts, an essay on “ John Knox  
 And Education,” mortgages and deeds,  
 Insignia of orders, and degrees,  
 A cellar full of port, the cellar’s keys,

Plate, furniture, and linen ; a collection  
 Of drawings by Rossetti and Burne-Jones  
 And Madox Brown, in whom Art reached perfection  
 For old Sir Somerset, who spoke of them in tones  
 Of awe, as one might speak of a connection  
 With saints and angels on their golden thrones.  
 Pre-Raphaelite, the Chelsea coterie  
 In Art were Noel's uncle's Q.E.D.

With wealth, a famous name, a hero's lustre  
 About his parentage, romance to give  
 The final touch to Noel's noble muster  
 Of qualities entitling him to live  
 The gay existence of a London buster,  
 One lack made all his fortune like a sieve  
 Through which his passion trickled. He had lost  
 The love wherewith he could his fate accost.

His mother wished her boy to make a stir,  
 To marry some fair maid who, being trained  
 In social climbing, would comply with her  
 In making Noel do what he disdained  
 And lick the boots of those who can confer  
 Position on the rich whose wealth has gained  
 For them the outer courts of the great portals  
 For ever closed to poor but honest mortals.

Mammas propose, but married women dish  
 Both them and God's disposal of young men.  
 In London, though a bachelor may wish  
 To live like a well-ordered citizen,  
 He's like an open oyster to the fish  
 In clusters waiting for the moment when  
 The hapless mollusc leaves himself exposed—  
 A swoop, a gulp, the oyster's tale is closed.

Wealth, fame, distinction or an honoured name,  
 These women covet as they ache for pearls  
 To make themselves successful in the game  
 From which they are excluded as mere girls  
 Until they're married, when they lose all shame,  
 And as the Season seizes them and whirls  
 Them on, they gather up their stolen spoils :  
 Clothes, money, jewels, men within their toils.

Good-naturedly, as Ellen drove him on,  
 Young Noel let himself be drawn into  
 The rout and half forgot his vision,  
 So many were the pleasures of the few.  
 His love with Katje seemed for ever gone.  
 It mattered little what he chose to do.  
 He danced and dined and stayed in country houses,  
 Indulging there in sundry wild carouses.

His friends were guardsmen, and he stayed with them,  
 Played polo, gambled, ragged and bullied toughs  
 Gazetted by mistake, nor tried to stem  
 The wildness that recalled to mind the roughs  
 Let loose the night that broke the British phlegm,  
 And set the nation turning back its cuffs  
 To take it out of someone for the slight  
 The Boers had put upon Great Britain's might.

The King, as Noel's uncle prophesied,  
 Installed a Court of Jewish millionaires  
 Who saw good business in such regicide  
 And shortly held the nation by the hairs.  
 It had to take what *they* chose to provide.  
 Low life they let appear above the stairs,  
 And Jews who'd gone to Africa by steerage  
 Now bought themselves a place in Britain's Peerage.

With low life surging like a dirty flood,  
 It seemed that none now cared to stay at home.  
 Unresting feet ploughed through the city's mud.  
 At night the lights put out the starry dome,  
 And none had leisure now to chew the cud  
 Of thought, but all were drawn into the foam  
 And dirty froth churned by the brimming river  
 That drowned the landmarks of old days for ever.

But on his raft of money Noel floated  
 And unmoved saw Old England slowly drown.  
 Each Honour as it sank he duly noted  
 And doffed his hat to its decayed renown,  
 The Monarchy, the House of Lords, the doted  
 Authority that governed London Town,  
 The ancient laws, the constitution crumbling,  
 The ruined fabric tottering and tumbling.

And he enjoyed it much as he enjoyed  
 In Africa the sight of ant-heaps washed  
 Away by rain. If it could be destroyed,  
 If it was so defiled and so deboshered  
 That only money kept its parts upbuoyed,  
 Then it was surely time its power was squashed  
 Before corruption spread to bring dismay  
 To life elsewhere more worthy of the day.

This was his deep impression, but he needed  
 A knowledge more precise before he plunged.  
 His mother worried much, and often pleaded  
 With him to rid himself of those who sponged  
 Upon his generosity. He weeded  
 His large acquaintance out but always lunged  
 Away from marriage, which his mother hoped  
 Would settle him. He would not, and she moped.

He said : " Dear mother, mother of my soul,  
 Who made me free and brought me up to hate  
 The code of modern morals and the whole  
 Fantastic fabric of the modern state,  
 Now leave me free to drive towards my goal,  
 To be the lord and master of my fate,  
 And not the puppet of the notoriety  
 Which animates this half-effete society.

" In Africa we kindled to the sun  
 And from the earth drew sweetest nourishment  
 For body, mind and soul, but here is none.  
 Here are all three in huddled masses pent.  
 The Trinity is never clearly One.  
 Its force is lost in fruitless argument.  
 And marriage here as far as I can see  
 Means Woman added to the Trinity."

Strange words that Ellen hardly understood.  
 A pardoned rebel, she could tolerate  
 The very things, in her rich widowhood,  
 That, as a wife, she fiercely used to hate,  
 And even in the vilest saw some good.  
 She did not wish her son to isolate  
 Himself when all the world was at his nod  
 And he could live at peace with man and God.

The house in Kensington was open day  
 And night, and guardsmen, barristers and actors,  
 Young literary men all whiled away  
 Their too great leisure. Sons of rich contractors,  
 At Eton varnished, brought their ladies gay  
 To drink Champagne and Cognac, those great factors  
 In every walk of moneyed London life,  
 The rich man's Beer, for which he starves his wife.

And soon the house in Kensington outvied  
 The Continental as a rendezvous.  
 It seemed to Ellen social suicide,  
 But Noel said : " In Britain one must do  
 As Britons do." Heart-broken, Ellen cried :  
 "They are not frank, and with your frankness you  
 Will come to ruin. These poor wretches know  
 The line that's drawn and farther do not go."

The women tried in vain to catch their young  
 Maeenias, so romantic, handsome, rich.  
 In deed so reckless, yet he was in tongue  
 Most guarded, and the women knew not which  
 He was, a cynic or an idiot who flung  
 His wealth about to ease the spending itch.  
 He moved among them silent, pale and kind,  
 And hated most in them their lack of mind.

But nowhere could he ease the aching passion  
 That throbbed in him and twinged for lack of dreams  
 And purpose that should dominate the fashion,  
 Not follow it and pleasure's fitful gleams.  
 "Give me an aim," he cried, "and I will dash on  
 Until 'tis won, and beauty no more seems  
 To be, but is." His cry of passion uttered  
 What every heart in London only muttered.

He loved this London, sprawling, helpless, mean,  
 So accidental, vague, so kindly-eruel,  
 So comic that the very air's serene  
 With humour, the surprising lovely jewel  
 Within the toad-like head. O ! ne'er was seen  
 So vast a joke, and this was all the fuel  
 That Noel's passion found in London's magic.  
 A joke ! The flower of generations tragic.

Its perfume sweetened all, the Jewish Court,  
 The ponderous submission to the law,  
 The law's practitioners, the last resort  
 Of scoundrels, patriotism, the raw  
 And raucous newspapers, the lowest sort  
 Of entertainments, the undue awe  
 Accorded to play-actors, journalists  
 And men whose fame was in their padded fists.

When Wordsworth lived the nation loved its Tupper.  
 Now Toppers bloomed and Wordsworth was there none.  
 The feast of letters looked like a Last Supper  
 Without its central figure. There'd begun  
 An inky orgy which begrimed the upper  
 And educated classes till they run  
 And read, and run, and reading run until  
 They have nor mind, nor hope, nor faith, nor will.

This was the greatest joke of all that men  
 With Shakespeare, Milton, Newton, Shelley,  
 Keats, Johnson, Dryden, Fielding, William Penn,  
 Swift and Defoe to guide them should a belly  
 Full of wind prefer, and breaking from their den,  
 Their towns so reeking, smoke-begrimed and smelly,  
 Turn to a Harmsworth as their guide and friend,  
 To learn destruction when 'twas time to mend.

And no one saw the joke but Noel, whom  
 It hurt and yet delighted. No one minded.  
 And no one saw the clouds that he saw loom  
 Out of this joke, for everyone was blinded  
 By what seemed light after the three years' gloom  
 Of war, for no one wished to be reminded  
 Of that mistake which almost turned the joke  
 Into a nightmare which the sleeper woke.

“There’ll be no war as long as we’ve a king  
 Like good King Edward.” There’ll be war  
 As long as there are Harmsworths maflicking  
 From day to day in print and Britons are  
 So foolish as to think that when they sing  
 Their *Rule, Britannia* there’s a special star  
 To which their waggon’s hitched to pull them through  
 And keep them ignorant of what they do.

To see the soft spring light on London’s spires,  
 Or touch to opal waves on tidal Thames,  
 Green buds on blackened trees! In all the shires,  
 Though every one contains a thousand gems  
 Of landscape, nothing so fulfils desires  
 Of hearts for home as spring with diadems  
 Of green and gold renewing ecstasy  
 In ancient London’s heaped-up misery.

Perceiving this at last in Noel broke  
 His frozen passion into streams of laughter  
 Delirious, and the joy in him awoke  
 And made him see at last what he was after,  
 To see that London’s grim and deadly joke  
 Should blossom into joy to thwart the grafter,  
 The millionaire, the hack, who use the Press  
 To draw their profit from the public mess.

Perceiving this, to Ellen’s joy, he cast out  
 The rowdy crew who battened on his folly.  
 He said he wanted something that would last out  
 The seasons from the primrose to the holly.  
 “I’ll be,” he cried, “a real iconoclast out  
 Of joy and not from bilious melancholy.”  
 But in his image-breaking first went down  
 Poor Ellen’s dreams for him in London Town.

A Mrs Clement-Cluny smelt him out  
 As eats smell fish, and filched him like a cat ;  
 And of her aims gave him so little doubt  
 That he'd no notion what she would be at.  
 She took him everywhere with her about,  
 And made him help to furnish her new flat.  
 The story is so usual, so trite,  
 'Tis hardly worth the time it takes to write.

A nation must be judged by what it makes  
 Of women, and the Clement-Clunys swarm  
 In London Town : an empty heart that aches,  
 A busy mindless brain, a body warm  
 With sensual desire, an eye that fakes  
 The light of passion, promising a storm  
 Where there is only darkness and the dust  
 Of egoism crumbled into lust.

“Let her not draw thee with her eyelids.” Old  
 Advice from Solomon the Wise, but still  
 Adulterous women keep their strangle-hold  
 On life, and still keep stealthy watch to kill  
 Youth, charm and force and all that makes men bold  
 To follow dreams and passion’s windy will.  
 “Youth, youth, be mine,” cry women as they fade.  
 Their touch on youth makes life itself decayed.

“Youth, youth, be mine,” and chivalrous bright youth  
 Hears in the cry a lady in distress.  
 “Be young with me,” and melting into ruth  
 Youth rushes down into the sordid mess  
 That women make through being dead to truth,  
 To beauty blind in their vast selfishness.  
 So Noel rushed and let his springful blood  
 Be sucked out by a vampire in the mud.

A vampire Mrs Clement-Cluny was,  
 But very charming, and good company.  
 She knew her world and was a candid glass  
 To all its tricks and bland hypoerisy.  
 Musicians, artists, aetor-people pass  
 Through lives like hers and learn the knavery  
 Without which Art's forgotten in the race  
 For good positions in the market-place.

So charming was she that her lovers stayed  
 To be her friends when mimic love was broken  
 And Fancy to another pasture strayed,  
 Where eyes and lips say what is never spoken  
 Since they can lie when tongue is still afraid.  
 Yet friendliness with her remained the token  
 Of some cold honesty that in her tricks  
 Contrived a chill affection still to mix.

She lived for intrigue. Intrigue was to her  
 A deeper passion than true love's delight.  
 In politics, in art, the theatre,  
 And even church affairs she'd won the right  
 Of entry, and the rich financier,  
 Her husband, who made money day and night,  
 Consulted her and used her as his spy  
 To watch each movement as it rippled by.

She travelled much and netted fish in Rome,  
 In Paris and New York, and everywhere  
 She went she made herself no less at home  
 By intrigue than in London. By means fair  
 Or foul she broached the brimming honeycomb  
 Of luxury which she could not forbear.  
 When youth is gone then luxury tastes bitter,  
 And aching nerves begin to twinge and twitter.

“ Youth, youth, be mine.” Poor Noel, like so many,  
 Obliged politely out of youth’s excess,  
 Instead of saying : “ Madam, I’ve not any,”  
 Like Simple Simon, to the wickedness  
 Of such commercial persons. He’d the penny  
 That Mrs Clement-Cluny wished to press  
 Into the hand of Time, whose threatened scythe  
 Made all the woman in her quail and writhe.

Fleeing from Time, she hurled herself at Noel  
 With such a fury as to send him spinning.  
 His faculty of reason could not go well  
 Enough to help him baffle her in winning  
 With arts that he knew not and she must know well  
 In her much practice in that kind of sinning.  
 Her desperation woke in him a kind  
 Of passion which flamed up and made him blind.

He could not see that she had lost her soul  
 And wanted his to keep herself from dying  
 The moral death which gnawed a gaping hole  
 In her existence. There was no denying  
 The damage slowly wrought. Age like a mole  
 Had sapped her, while her frenzied lust of buying,  
 Intriguing, bargaining and pulling wires  
 Had choked with dust her passion’s waning fires.

The flame in Noel, steeped in Afrie’s sun,  
 Blazed through her, borne on winds of chivalry.  
 And what began as mild flirtation  
 Grew to a storm of sensuality.  
 But for the first time it contained no fun  
 For her, so near to love and liberty,  
 Yet too, too far, for living words he said  
 But made her know how nearly she was dead.

With painted eyes and artfully tinged cheeks,  
 A powdered bosom and a massaged throat,  
 Hair subtly trimmed, hair washed until it reeks  
 Of Morn, so she keeps herself afloat  
 Upon hot youth's illusions. When he speaks  
 Of love and freedom, all he says by rote  
 She learns, and seems before himself to know  
 The thing he means or meant once long ago.

Into her voice a flute-like note of joy,  
 Or something very like it, throbs and thrills  
 For him and him alone. Lest it should cloy  
 It breaks into a happy song that spills  
 In pleasure for her fire-bringing boy  
 On anything that his attention fills—  
 A glass of wine, a book, a merry tune,  
 The muffins of a winter afternoon.

She gave him presents which he pocketed  
 In half annoyance, for they did not bring  
 The gift for which he'd raised her from the dead,  
 The song of joy he hoped to hear her sing  
 Before her chance of it for ever sped  
 Down the dark void where each forgotten thing  
 In darkness fades and dwindles into shame  
 That it has lived but never burst in flame.

The obstinacy of his youth had mastered  
 His will until, self-hypnotised, he strove  
 To crack the lies with which her soul was plastered  
 And make it yield to him its treasure trove.  
 In vain, poor youth, he listened and at last heard  
 Her true note through the spells she subtly wove,  
 A harsh cracked note of jealous black despair  
 That wheresoe'er she went befouled the air.

Jealous she was of everything he wore,  
 Jealous of friends, acquaintances and kin,  
 Jealous of deeds both after and before,  
 Jealous of thought, of all he hoped to win,  
 Jealous of all that hurt and made him sore,  
 Jealous of love, that triumphed over sin  
 And let him go in youth's abounding grace  
 And left her gazing at her haggard face.

One day, returning home, he found a letter  
 From Germany and opened it to find  
 Five words from Katje saying she'd thought better  
 Of her vowed silence. Darkness from his mind  
 Rolled like a curtain. How could he forget her?  
 "Katje, Katje, true love in you was kind.  
 No jealous fury froze the living soul  
 And turned the burning heart to blackened coal."

Alas! the letter gave him no address,  
 No clue to where she was, save by the stamp.  
 And that was Marburg. Five short words could bless  
 His wounded spirit and relight the lamp  
 Of love to show him all his soul's distress,  
 This dark corruption of the cellar damp  
 Of London love and mimicry of passion  
 That women use to keep themselves in fashion.

"I'll tell her," Noel thought, with simple trust,  
 "That I'm in love, and always shall be so,  
 With Katje and I must do what I must.  
 She's old enough to understand and know  
 That we have had a strange spasmodic gust  
 Which could not last, and she will let me go."  
 So simply thought, so simply did the youth,  
 Not having learned that women hate the truth.

He learned it quickly through the jealous fury  
 With which the lady greeted what he said.  
 A Russian pogrom in a shrieking Jewry  
 Is not more cruel than the vengeance fed  
 By Jealousy, and dramas at Old Drury  
 Are tame beside the passions nourishèd  
 By false love scorned when shown up by the true—  
 Though happily such cases are but few.

But this was one of them, and Noel found  
 Himself involved in such a knotted skein  
 Of lives as made him feel the ground  
 Must open up and swallow him. So vain  
 Were all his efforts that he only wound  
 The skein so tight that trebled was his pain,  
 Quadrupled hers, who lost her ancient skill  
 And, losing that, went fiercely out to kill.

Her memories of mimic love all faded,  
 Her triumphs into yellow ashes crumbled,  
 Each seemed a step by which her life had faded  
 Into the nothing into which 'twas tumbled.  
 Up to her knees in mud and mire she waded,  
 And vowed she'd never rest until she'd humbled  
 The man, the men who'd brought her down so low.  
 Such debts as these she fiercely scorned to owe.

She'd pay in full, and Noel should not win  
 The girl whose letter more to him had proved  
 Than all the gifts she'd made to keep him in  
 The state of mind that made him think he loved  
 Herself, though the illusion was but thin.  
 Swept on by fury mindlessly she moved,  
 And quarrelled with her husband till he lost  
 All patience, plunged and made her pay the cost.

He'd waited long for just such evidence  
 As Noel's rashness gave him in full measure.  
 He'd waited long and slyly. Common-sense  
 Will always wait to steal upon the treasure  
 Of joy when it ignores the moral fence  
 Set up about the cheapest human pleasure.  
 For common-sense, like Kipling with his lay,  
 Cries ever to the joyous: "Pay, pay, pay."

Divorce, a scandal, withered Ellen's hope,  
 And like a tigress in she plunged to save  
 Her boy from toppling further down the slope  
 On which he stood into the yawning grave  
 Of loveless marriage, which had been the rope  
 That twice had strangled her. A narrow shave  
 Had Noel, for his chivalry inflamed  
 Exposed him to the Cluny still untamed.

The Cluny thought she had him in her net,  
 But Ellen tamed her, made her face the fact  
 That she had got to take what she could get.  
 Noel would see to it she never lacked  
 And he would pay for having so upset  
 Her apple-cart. The Cluny loudly smacked  
 Her hands together, wept and ran through all  
 Her repertoire of tricks theatrical.

But she accepted, and she disappeared,  
 And Noel hugged his misery and shame,  
 And counted up the wreckage where he feared  
 Love's rose would never blossom like a flame.  
 Why was it that his spirit always steered  
 His life upon the rocks? What was this game  
 Of London life, with complicated rules,  
 To help the knaves to prey upon the fools?

And Mrs Clement-Cluny symbolised  
 For him this London with its lingerie,  
 Its restaurants, its misery disguised  
 In splendour and respectability.  
 A savage, bitter woman! So he sized  
 His London up, and then he felt more free  
 To start again upon the quest of joy  
 That kept him through disaster still a boy.

“I will not marry,” so he told his mother.  
 “My heart is Katje’s, and without my heart  
 I will not share my life with any other.  
 Though Katje’s gone, yet I am still a part  
 Of her, and Time will never, never smother  
 The love we share and have shared from the start  
 Of our young lives out there where love could be  
 Before her people lost their liberty.

“In me I feel their freedom lives again,  
 In me for her, and that is now my gesture,  
 Here to revive the freedom that was slain  
 In Africa. Though often I’ve distressed your  
 Kind mother’s heart, and tortured it with pain,  
 I’ve not been blind, and often I have guessed your  
 Distress, but now at last I see quite clearly  
 What I’ve been up to when I’ve acted queerly.

“Don’t be alarmed, dear mother, if I act  
 More queerly yet. The river still must flow  
 Upon its course, and every cataract  
 Must reach smooth water somewhere. So I go  
 Through London’s fiction looking out for fact,  
 The rock beneath the mountain’s ice and snow.  
 Dear mother, though I’m bitten by the frost  
 Of Mrs Clement-Cluny, I’m not lost.”

His mother kissed him and her benison  
 She gave, and told her troubled heart the fault  
 Was hers if any, and she counted on  
 The lesson he had learned on this sharp halt.  
 His happiness was all the sun that shone  
 Upon her life, his joy its only salt.  
 That he was in extremest misery  
 She could not see, nor could he let her see.

The laws of England keep alive a race  
 Of men as cloistered as the monks of old.  
 The Temple is the still monastic place  
 Where brains grow dry and hearts grow weak and cold,  
 And withered passion greys the weary face  
 That cannot kindle even over gold.  
 This race of men can either earn no bread  
 Or have no time or zest for being fed.

The glib of tongue go into polities.  
 The thoughtful climb and cannot see beyond  
 The Bench or County Court. The dullard sticks  
 In chambers like a leaf upon a pond.  
 Briefs, wigs and gowns, gowns, wigs and briefs, the tricks  
 Of this most doleful trade make the despond  
 In which is sunk Great Britain's ancient power  
 On which the brewing storm-clouds loom and lour.

“Good-bye,” said Noel to the Temple when  
 His eyes were opened as I have narrated,  
 Good-bye to all the grey and parchment men  
 Upon whose life my pen has here dilated ;  
 Good-bye to briefs and dust, good-bye again  
 To hopes of being dull and celebrated  
 For helping knaves to circumvent the law  
 And honest men to writhe beneath its paw.

Good-bye, dear Law Courts, with your empty hall  
 Symbolical of Nothing. O good-bye !  
 Great Rufus, greater Danekwerts, Marshall Hall  
 And Eldon Bankes, long may your greatness lie  
 Unruffled : and, ye Benchers, ye who call  
 Young men within the Bar that youth may die,  
 A long farewell. You fatten in your Inns  
 Upon an ancient nation's hoard of sins.

For what is law but sin legitimate  
 By purchase ? Said Noel : " I will sin,  
 If sin I must, as I will love and hate,  
 In Freedom, and that Freedom will I win  
 By no vile homage to a tricked-out State,  
 Through dusty lawyers who have wriggled in  
 To what is left of a forgotten Church ;  
 Dead long ago and long left in the lurch.

" Farewell, you lawyers, who attempt to rule  
 Without authority but by your wits.  
 Farewell, a long farewell, another school  
 I seek that teaches wisdom unto its  
 Devout by holding up the clever fool  
 To scorn before the throne where Wisdom sits.  
 That throne's the heart of man, whose majesty  
 Gives man's usurping code of Law the lie."

The corpse of poor Sir Somerset within  
 Its grave must then have turned to hear his heir  
 So speak, as though the Law itself were sin.  
 But so it is, as Noel in his debonair  
 And happy insight knew. He gave a grin  
 To think how he'd have made his uncle's hair  
 Stand up on end to hear such blasphemy  
 Upon the Law's respectability.

The Lord Chief Justice and the Chancellor,  
 The Master of the Rolls, Lords Justices,  
 The Justices and the Solicitor-  
 And the Attorney-General—are these  
 Well-paid officials really hired for  
 Their kindly keeping of our consciences?  
 Of course not. They're to oil the wheels for us  
 To sin and have the minimum of fuss.

Good-bye then to the Law. That is the net  
 In which the British mind is caught and trapped.  
 Not so my Noel. He could never let  
 The thread between himself and Truth be snapped,  
 Nor in the common falsehood could forget  
 The Love that lived when lawful Britons scrapped  
 The free Republics of the peaceful Dutch,  
 Who gained their all in grimly losing much.

East from the Temple Fleet Street runs with ink,  
 And eastward turned my Noel from the West,  
 Where men in lewdness lose the power to think,  
 And losing that are dead to all the rest.  
 He could not learn like them to grin and blink  
 At half the nation being dispossessed  
 To choke the other half with monstrous wealth  
 Which leaves no room for spiritual health.

He bought a paper which was derelict,  
 And published it on Wednesday afternoons.  
 His Editor he very wisely picked,  
 One Rubio, who'd learned his job with Newnes  
 And sickened of the daily interdict  
 Upon his brains, that still had left some tunes  
 Of wit and humour from the weary round  
 That almost had his soul to Tit-Bits ground.

This man, a Jew, adored his master and  
 Gainsaid him never when he had his fling,  
 Although he could not wholly understand  
 Why Noel should so joyfully take wing  
 Upon his weekly flights when no demand  
 Was made for thoughts as fragrant as the spring.  
 But Noel loved his paper and the fun  
 Of letting all his hoarded fancies run.

The paper fairly soon began to sell,  
 And Rubio in time began to see,  
 But faintly, what his master had to tell  
 The British public in its majesty  
 New-found and vaunted by the miracle  
 Of papers printed by machinery  
 In thousands, millions, scattered far and wide  
 By special trains for mental suicide.

And Noel even met the great assassin  
 Who murdered mind with cheaply printed sheets  
 And would not suffer living thought to pass in  
 To his excitement which not even Keats  
 Or Shelley could have borne, though there was gas in  
 Plenty in their day, 'gainst which the spirit beats  
 Its power, its song until its music rises  
 Above the din and heaven's gate surprises.

There was a frenzy in this man to get  
 In Quick before the people could begin  
 To think, for if they did they would upset  
 The goal he'd marked out for himself to win,  
 To hustle, hustle, and to know no let  
 Until his house became the dorsal fin  
 Upon the gudgeon's back. And no one knew  
 But Noel what this man proposed to do.

To hustle, hustle, till his circulation  
 Reached figures never dreamed of in the Street.  
 To hustle, hustle, till the British nation  
 Could hardly tell its brain-pan from its feet.  
 To hustle, hustle, till in desperation  
 The lawyers in the Temple would be beat.  
 Aye, even they with all their supple cunning  
 Would have to read as they were kept a-running.

This was a lovely game for Noel, this  
 Perception of what things were going on  
 Beneath the surface of great London's bliss  
 In its Imperial religion,  
 This solitary glimpse down the abyss  
 Where never sun nor moon nor stars had shone,  
 And all was dark as hell save for the heat  
 That lit the lamps for Harmsworth in the Street.

From Westminster authority had fled  
 Unto the Law, and lawyers made their profit  
 Like leeches sucking at a man nigh dead  
 Until the blast of war just blew them off it  
 And blew them East where men who still saw red  
 Pounced on the remnant, gulped and would not cough it  
 Up. O lovely game, O grimdest of grim jokes,  
 What time the unled herd sweats, steams and smokes.

And Noel with his paper pointed out  
 These things, but no one heeded what he cried.  
 At Westminster was gathered up a rout  
 To wrangle over details and the pride  
 Of certain classes to maintain without  
 Suspecting that the thing they loved had died.  
 The stair that lawyers climbed had broken down,  
 Now none could win but all must steal renown.

None had renown by birth ; that much was settled.  
 And none was great but by the British Press.  
 "This cannot work," said Noel, somewhat nettled  
 To see fools strutting in their paper dress.  
 But work it did, and those too highly mettled .  
 To eringe were voices in the wilderness.  
 Voices there were of every timbre and tone,  
 But none were heard but through the megaphone.

All night machines thumped out the daily hash.  
 And brains were pulped to give it spiee and bite.  
 The newsboys through the traffic dart and dash  
 To feed the gaping public's appetite  
 For winners, crimes, at best a railway smash  
 Now that the thrill of war is out of sight.  
 All night machines grind out their late editions,  
 As later on machines ground out munitions.

Bow down, bow down, before the god Machine  
 That gathers up so many human lives  
 And grinds to dust the glory that has been,  
 And makes men live like slavish bees in hives :  
 Like wretched bees who've hived without a queen,  
 So that their laws are manacles and gyves  
 About them, since they cannot face the light  
 To rise superbly on the marriage flight.

This then was England, a poor hive of drones,  
 Drone, droning on in blind obedience,  
 Like a poor beggar hammering his stones  
 Eight hours a day against a wooden fence,  
 To keep existence in his skin and bones  
 And spend on beer his hard-earned eighteen-pence.  
 Now Noel heard the megaphonic voice  
 And knew that poor old England had no choice.

Katje had said the dead would rise and cry  
 For vengeance to be wrung a thousand-fold,  
 To pay the cost of Britain's victory.  
 Would Death then cry his vengeance on the old ?  
 This poor old man, too old for liberty,  
 Too old for aught but to be bought and sold,  
 Too old for aught but for his meagre cheer  
 In selling labour for a pint of beer.

Ind Coope is good, and Worthington is good,  
 And Bass is elegant, and Allsopp's mild,  
 A carter's pint is always understood  
 Where argument and sense seem vague and wild.  
 Beer is the British worker's homely food,  
 Therein are contradictions reconciled.  
 Beer, glorious beer, is more than food for thought,  
 'Tis thought itself, the thing that feareth naught.

The solid thought of Britain is all beer.  
 Outside there are anaemic nimble minds  
 Which waste themselves in their attempt to steer  
 Their little boats through all the shifting winds  
 What time the barrel-hulk contrives to veer  
 In solemn sluggish safety through all kinds  
 Of weather. I can't keep this up for long.  
 My Muse says: "Poet, tune thy soul to song."

I'll sing of beer, but think it I will not,  
 Nor will my Noel, as we go up West  
 To find out what there is to stop the rot  
 Among the educated whose behest  
 Has still some weight until the iron's hot  
 Wherewith the rich shall blind the dispossessed.  
 Did no one know what villainy was brewing,  
 Or what in all this vat of life was stewing ?

No. No one. Those were days of empty fooling  
 In life as on the stage, where Bernard Shaw  
 Began to put the nation through its schooling  
 For its revolt—in time—against the law  
 And rulers who had no idea of ruling  
 And yet could not suspect there was a flaw  
 In their capacity which won them votes  
 On which their thought still dwells and fondly doles.

Wast never at the Court? Then thou art damned.  
 With Rubio my Noel paid his court  
 To something almost art, where others shammed  
 And made the theatre the last resort  
 Of gambling commeree. Here the plays were crammed  
 With so much styleless talk that the report  
 Of wit in it was like a pistol shot  
 Which galvanised what else was platform rot.

It came from much debating in societies.  
 Behind it was a life of scores of scores,  
 And Bernard Shaw topped all the notorieties  
 And skittles played with old established bores  
 Who writhed beneath his impudent impieties  
 Which broke upon their orchestrated snores.  
 They growled and grumbled, but at last success  
 Made popular the famous G. B. S.

O Pierrot! O Faun! So Walkley wrote,  
 O mischievous, say I, O wanton wag  
 Upon whose wit no other mind can float!  
 O solitary boy set out to drag  
 The over-grown-up English down, thy note  
 Was still too thin to reach them as they lag  
 Behind the world in art and thought and drama  
 Through gazing on their Empire's panorama.

O Pierrot! O Faun! O Irish Bishop!  
 (For such you might have been) I here salute  
 You as my vagrant pen runs on to dish up  
 The work that won you fame and good repute.  
 You angled long. At last you brought your fish up  
 And bought yourself another Jaeger suit.  
 With *Man and Superman* you conquered men,  
 With help from Granville Barker and Vedrenne.

The Court was like a little winking star  
 In evening darkness in an autumn wood  
 Full of corruption, where the lichens mar  
 The sturdy trees that have for ages stood.  
 But mildew, moss and blighting fungus are  
 Too strong at last. The earth has no more good  
 To give in sap. Here life is at its ebb.  
 The busy spider weaves its mourning web.

Clear dewy drops upon the web do shine,  
 And shines the star through trellised twigs and leaves,  
 But no wind stirs and no bird pours the wine  
 Of song upon the soul as here it grieves.  
 And through a mist of tears sees the divine  
 Eternal message of the star that cleaves  
 Its way through spider-threads that hold the wood  
 In the foul spell of dank decrepitude.

The star winked laughter to the tortured soul  
 To bid it not to weep and add its tears  
 To so much moisture, but to play the rôle  
 Assigned to humankind, beset with fears,  
 Yet ever beckoned to the hero's goal,  
 The silence broken only by the shears  
 Of Clotho, and beyond that to the place  
 Where stars are torches for a deathless race.

So Noel thought and so told Rubio,  
 Who thought his master was a little cracked.  
 "We laugh at this to stop the coming flow  
 Of tears," said Noel. "We have been attacked  
 By worse than mildew, and our spiders grow  
 The fatter while our treasure is ransacked."  
 Said Rubio: "This kills the problem play.  
 Pinero, Jones & Co. have had their day."

"This is the knot," said Noel inly musing,  
 "That ends a great tradition, this the laughter  
 In which a man seeks comfort when he's losing  
 His fight against the gods and sees thereafter  
 No hope but that his sons may find amusing  
 The story of his toil on which the grafted,  
 The human spider, fastens in his labour  
 To break the bonds that bind man to his neighbour."

A small event may in its hidden meaning  
 Reveal an age, so Noel pondered long  
 What time his soul was delicately weaning  
 His passion's hope from London's motley throng  
 Since now it had no hope of ever gleaning  
 Therefrom its longed-for harvest of clear song.  
 So round the Court my Noel's fancy played  
 And had its port port measured up and weighed.

In wit as sore as that of Beaumarchais  
 Great London gave its ghost, in stone its pride.  
 The Mall with fancies haunted of the day  
 Of Congreve, Wycherley and Vanbrugh died  
 And was entombed in a Triumphal Way  
 Down which King Edward and his Jews should ride  
 In moneyed peace and popularity  
 While England multiplied her ships at sea.

King Edward might forget the war, but not so  
 The yeasty Harmsworth raising Standard Bread.  
 The paper-eating Baronet had got so  
 Enamoured of the map all painted red  
 That he was out to keep the public hot so  
 Long as there were pockets to be bled.  
 He screamed for war with France, but Edward Rex  
 Wooed Paris with his knowledge of the sex.

*Vive Edouard le Roi, le gros bonhomme,*  
*Vive l'Entente Cordiale, à bas Fashoda,*  
*Conspuez Harmsworth, who with great aplomb*  
*Thinned down his blood with quantities of soda,*  
*Seltzer and blood ! He hurled his paper bomb*  
*Into the Rhine, the Mosel and the Oder.*  
*But as it did not help his circulation*  
*He turned and fawned upon the British nation.*

Great Britain, Greater Britain, Greatest Nation,  
 The grandeur that was Greece has passed away,  
 The glory that was Rome is now damnation,  
 The French won't fight for they have had their day.  
 Someone must fight to give us a sensation  
 And "Rule, Britannia" all the world shall say  
 Upon its knees beside the open graves  
 That Britain digs for those who touch the waves.

"My Rubio," said Noel, "will you please  
 Print in my paper that we now enjoy  
 The *smallest* circulation of all these  
 Unworthy sheets which so much time employ  
 In turning blood to ink, the moon to cheese,  
 The sun to gold, the earth to its alloy.  
 We have the *smallest* circulation, but  
 We keep tradition's thread from being cut."

“ You’ll lose your money,” said the cautious Jew.  
 “ That’s my affair,” said Noel ; “ if I lose it  
 I’ll earn my living as I ought to do.  
 My money’s mine, but I will not abuse it  
 Or hand it over to the nameless crew  
 Who say they know much better how to use it,  
 But let Great Britain grow into a slum  
 Where men grow pale that great machines may hum.”

Said Rubio : “ ‘Tis vain to fight machines,  
 For they will run while there are lives to feed them,  
 And men must live although they foul the scenes  
 Where men and women loved of old to breed them.  
 You thank your stars that you have private means,  
 The time may come when you will sorely need them.  
 Don’t waste them now, a hundred quid a week.  
 When money talks, ‘tis vain for men to speak.”

In London money chattered like a grove  
 Of apes, a never-ceasing, rising, falling chatter.  
 Like sucking waves upon a pebbled cove  
 The tide of money crushed the brain to batter.  
 And Noel, though most manfully he strove,  
 Found that his thoughts were growing ever flatter,  
 And flat his paper fell as week by week  
 He struggled on in human tones to speak.

He ruined Rubio by making him  
 Acquire the art of thinking ere he wrote :  
 For Rubio to write with greater vim  
 Had learned to write quite mindlessly by rote  
 What Newnes designed to catch the public’s whim.  
 His work was no more than a paper boat  
 Put out to circle, dart and skim and sink—  
 A waste of time, and paper, pen and ink.

So London floundered in an inky sea,  
 And hearts were cold, minds starved while men still looked  
 To Westminster to give their liberty  
 Some meaning now that Peace was safely booked.  
 But meaning was there none for eye to see  
 Or heart to know. Another fish was hooked,  
 And that was all. Britannia with her prong  
 Digs out her meal and hears no poet's song.

And Rubio lost patience and protested :  
 " If you're a poet, go away and sing.  
 The blackbird sings until his mate is nested  
 And doesn't care a damn for anything,  
 Though life is hard for birds, whose joy is tested  
 By hawks and other Harmsworths on the wing."  
 Though Noel's sorrow came from seeing Truth,  
 'Twas hardened by the strain of love-lorn youth.

Soon khaki worship waned. The deluge came.  
 The Rand had been revived by Chinese coolies.  
 Indentured labour! Slavery! The shame  
 Was too, too much for Manchester, whose rule is  
 To play the Yankee's not the Southern game,  
 The game so clearly shown by Mr Dooley's  
 Philosophy—that is, to hold and bind  
 Men everywhere by economic grind.

To bring Chineses and to feed them well,  
 To give them money and no great expenses,  
 This was the very policy of hell  
 To holy Manchester, whose moral sense is  
 Too keen for my immoral pen to tell.  
 For Manchester its moral sense condenses  
 In keeping wages low, expenses high,  
 That men must slave in freedom till they die.

Between the systems Noel could not see  
 An inch of difference, save that the last  
 Gave greater room for smug hypocrisy,  
 The flag which Manchester nails to the mast,  
 Enslaving men, pretending they are free.  
 The British Liberal can be aghast  
 At men enslaved who know it and don't need  
 The drugs of what the rich give them to read.

There will be slaves as long as there are men  
 Who buy the lives, the work, the souls of others,  
 As there are many underneath Big Ben  
 Who buy the laws to subjugate their brothers  
 And with their wealth control the scratching pen  
 That breeds the lie which Truth and Freedom smothers.  
 And British slaves were made to understand  
 That slavery was rampant on the Rand.

Away then with the Tories and their frank  
 Defiance of the Nonconformist cry !  
 Away then with the military plank  
 And back to Naval Britain's Liberty !  
 For Peace and Freedom Britons have to thank  
 The Navy. Let the estimates be high.  
 Two keels to one. The Navy does not lead  
 To making slaves of men who cannot read.

It certainly makes slaves of men who can,  
 But that's too deep for British minds to follow.  
 The Navy's somehow clean and Christian,  
 A medicine that a sea-girt race can swallow—  
 The tubs thumped for the beery Englishman  
 Of course are most invariably hollow  
 Because he's drunk the contents. Be it noted,  
 On seas of beer the British Navy's floated.

Through all the uproar Noel felt a chill  
 And icy stream of creeping terror running.  
 'Twas like the silence of a conscience still  
 While mind and passion are employed by cunning,  
 The deadly silence which no sound can kill :  
 Or like a creditor who's done with dunning  
 And lets the anxious debtor run a while  
 Until more debts are added to his pile.

And vainly through it all my Noel waited  
 To hear some stirring of the heart. None came.  
 The triumph of the polls was overrated.  
 The Nonconformist vote put out the shame  
 Of slavery upon the Rand, but stated  
 No clause of Freedom, and in accents tame  
 Repeated all the cant the Tories raised  
 What time their eyes on Golden Afric gazed.

Some stirring of the head he heard, cold bubbles,  
 The froth in citric-acid lemonade,  
 The Fabians had diagnosed the troubles  
 To be put right, and Sidney Webb had laid  
 A scheme by which a novel Poor Law doubles  
 The swollen staff that mans the Board of Trade.  
 For Sidney Webb, like Milner, thought that life  
 Just needed pruning with the expert's knife.

Experts, officials, Blue-books and reports  
 A regimented world told how to live,  
 And how to grapple simply with all sorts  
 Of problems by resorting to the sieve  
 Of offices. The old world played with forts,  
 The new with bureaux plays, and it can give  
 As little joy to men, who left alone  
 Would quickly learn to make their lives their own.

But still we let *I dare not* wait upon  
*I would*, still busy minds must hatch a plot  
 To fill the gap between the two, and on  
 The great world wags though men are shot  
 And starved and tortured while the union  
 Of these two thoughts is baffled by the rot  
 That sets in through the horrible activity  
 That comes from the most mischievous proclivity

Of barren minds which, while true minds are wooing,  
 Steal in and bolt and bar the House of Love  
 And empty it to all the world's undoing.  
 Between *I dare not* and *I would* they shove  
 The mischief that has been so long a-brewing  
 Since Noah ope'd the window to the dove  
 And thought himself so great for having found  
 A way to keep the race from being drowned.

All this was written week by week in verse  
 In Noel's paper by his Rubio,  
 Who cut his thoughts according to the purse  
 That paid him, and could regulate the flow  
 Of words with which this Jew could bless or curse  
 The Christians and their most Pagan show.  
 His master's thoughts he turned into a chant  
 Of gloomy woe, like Mr F. his aunt.

So this was London, gloom lit up with folly.  
 A moneyed caste descended on the scene  
 Like locusts, and ate up the rather jolly  
 Well-mannered London there had always been.  
 A London fit for Joels, Jack and Solly  
 Now came to life, gilt, gaudy—aye, but mean.  
 No house was big enough to hold these swells  
 Who overflowed into the new hotels.

Machines again, machines to catch the rich  
 And drain them dry as they had drained the poor,  
 And make them useless for the purpose which  
 Had made their power. Like the Koh-i-noor,  
 The millionaire stood for a certain pitch  
 Of wealth, but wealth within a cage. A ditch  
 With pimpernel and speedwell were far better.  
 The spirit there is not bound by the letter.

The spirit in a hedgerow's like a flower  
 And breathes its perfume to the loving air  
 And knows itself the symbol of a power  
 Far greater than the world between *I dare*  
*Not* and *I would*, for in its happy hour  
 It dares and wills and knows itself how rare  
 It is, how precious, how far greater than the day  
 Or night that sweeps the man-made world away.

The early hedgerows reddens to the spring.  
 Soon catkins come and tiny buds are green,  
 Then violets blow and primroses all sing  
 Their modest song to wake the sleeping scene.  
 Birds take it up and girls their blushes bring  
 To waken men to see the yet unseen.  
 O ! surely now in spring they will unbind  
 Their eyes and no more go on being blind.

They'll surely see the glory through the eyes  
 Of women and the rapture in the smile  
 Of new young life, the ever-new surprise  
 Upon an infant's face. They'll lose their guile  
 In sheer enchantment as the vile disguise  
 Falls off humanity that all this while,  
 This long, long while, has laboured on  
 To give poor fools their base dominion.

The fields are green with corn, the trees with may  
 And chestnut red and white, the cattle browse  
 And horses in the evening dart away  
 So filled with winy air they must carouse  
 And call the night up with a shrilling neigh,  
 Birds sing, but huddled men down yonder house  
 Their cares and hug them till they cannot feel  
 The wonder that all other lives reveal.

'Tis wonderful to kill another man,  
 'Tis wonderful to crush an enemy,  
 'Tis wonderful to be a Christian  
 And in another's sorrow to feel free.  
 And wonderful it is with glee to scan  
 The havoc wrought by wars for liberty.  
 And when the enemy is soundly beaten  
 'Tis great to be both drunk and overeaten.

“ I've had enough,” said Noel ; “ there is more  
 In this than meets the eye. It is enough.  
 Come, Rubio, we cannot hope to score  
 O'er people dosed with sentiment, *quant. suff.*  
 Somewhere must live the virtue I adore.  
 I cannot stand this Nonconformist stuff.  
 You shall not lose your job for you shall be  
 My Sancho Panza and shall go with me.

“ My Dulcinea's somewhere to be found,  
 From Germany she wrote to me when I  
 Had played the idiot. Her spirit round  
 Me hovered and revealed the foolish lie  
 By which the Clement-Cluny had me bound.  
 I'll find her or I'll know the reason why.  
 This London like a pirate ship is drunk,  
 And like a pirate ship 'twill soon be sunk.”



## CANTO FOUR



## CANTO IV

*Poète, prend ton luth.* O Poet, take  
Thy lute and sing of Paris, where de Musset  
Sang sweeter than the blackbird in the brake,  
Where later on melodious Debussy  
Built up a music for pure musie's sake  
Which put to shame great Wagner's rich and juicy  
Theatrical confections, though I rather  
Imagine he was Claude Debussy's father

In music. Sing, sweet poet, of the Quais,  
The Luxembourg, the Louvre, the Trocadero,  
For here upon the gloomiest of days,  
The Jour des Morts, descended now my hero  
With Rubio. A cold and noisome haze  
Hung over Paris, gloomy, dark and drear. O !  
For dark depression and for gloom abysmal  
Than Paris no great city is more dismal.

But, Poet, sing and, please, my Muse, stand by,  
For here you have a subject to your liking,  
The Jour des Morts, the day that stands out high  
Above the rest. The contrast is most striking.  
The French are gay? The Poet cannot lie,  
And when my Noel, ruddy as a Viking,  
Strode through November Paris with his Jew  
The city seemed to take a sable hue.

Sable is Paris, darkling as a stream  
 Between its snowy banks. They do not know  
 Their Paris who believe the thing they dream  
 And only see what Paris cares to show.  
 In Paris lives a faith that gives no gleam  
 But smoulders with a dull and steady glow.  
 Dull, steady, awful in its white-hot passion,  
 No wonder Paris finds relief in fashion.

Hard by St Germain an *appartement*  
*À louer* lured the travellers within.  
 And Noel took it at a rent of *cent*  
*Vingt francs par mois.* As clean as a new pin  
 It was, and, as the *patronne* said, "*très élégant.*"  
 "By Jove!" said Noel, "here at last I'll win  
 The peace of mind I've never once enjoyed  
 Since my young love by England was destroyed.

"I like this Jour des Morts. It's something like  
 The eating canker gnawing at my heart.  
 You, Rubio, can do just as you like,  
 But I am here to work and study art,  
 For there I think I possibly may strike  
 The trail I want." "If I can get a start,"  
 Said Rubio, "I'll boom the new Entente,  
 For that is what the British surely want.

"They think of Paris as a kind of sink  
 Of women lost to shame and decency,  
 Because the facts the British always blink  
 Are dealt with here with open honesty.  
 The British live unmindful of the stink  
 Beneath their noses in their prudery.  
 I'll write of Paris for the picture papers  
 And make them see there's more in it than capers."

Now as he moved among the painters and  
 The poets of the Left Bank Noel saw  
 That here were men who tried to understand  
 What they were doing, meant it, knew no law  
 But their own passion for the selfless, grand  
 Heroic squaring to the mighty awe  
 Of Art wherein they found the hand of God  
 To point the way that honest men have trod.

In that keen air the Philistine must die,  
 As Heine knew when, shaking off the dust  
 Of Göttingen, he made resolve to fly  
 Across the Jordan-Rhine to break the crust  
 That choked his soul until its bitter ery  
 Broke in melodious song to mock the lust  
 With which the Prussian threatened everything  
 That took the air and lived upon the wing.

So Heine, like my Noel, winged his way  
 (Like Wagner too) to Paris, where the thought  
 Of all the race lives fearless of the day.  
 For here the mind's great battles have been fought,  
 Here men can think (and thinking is to pray),  
 Here is the Grail that mindful men have sought,  
 Here held aloft for men of every nation  
 Who've shaken off the shackles of sensation.

But they are few, yet, congregating here,  
 They do a generation's thinking for it,  
 And never loose a thought until 'tis clear,  
 So clear indeed that muddled minds abhor it,  
 And cling to ancient formulæ for fear  
 Their world should crack and nothing should restore it.  
 A noble city, noble spirits built her  
 To be mankind's invaluable filter.

All thoughts then lead to Paris, where they find  
New blinding thought to bring the revelation  
That there is always hope for humankind.  
So Noel found, and in his exaltation  
Looked round in quite another frame of mind  
From that which brought him so much irritation  
In London, where no mind can chew the cud  
And thought is trampled in the city's mud.

And, looking round, it was not long before  
A woman's form loomed most attractively  
Upon his vision. Though he roundly swore  
That he henceforth would pass all women by,  
The lovely Juliette Dupuy was more  
Attracted by him than she cared to be.  
She hated Englishmen and was betrothed  
To an old banker whom she warmly loathed.

There is, as Byron said, a tide in the  
Affairs of women. There's another when  
A man discovers in himself the sea  
Of his own thoughts. At such times men,  
Though vowed to a severe austerity,  
Just lose their new-found heads and then  
A woman who is swinging on her tide  
Can't help herself. They cannot but collide.

And so it was with Juliette. She said,  
In charming broken English, she could never  
Do what she quickly did when Noel read  
Her deep desire in spite of her endeavour  
To make her heart hark to her wiser head.  
Once it was done, then neither tried to sever  
The thread that bound them in their happiness  
Though Love came not their union to bless.

Still it was very pleasant. Through French eyes  
 Young Noel learned to see the frugal France  
 That out of ashes to the great surprise  
 Of Europe rose once more to lead the Danee.  
 A Dance of Death? Old Holbein's kindly eyes  
 Saw Europe always to the pipe of chance  
 In roundel, minuet, gavotte make play,  
 While Death stood by and waited for his prey.

And while he learned to see he learned to hate  
 The *rentiers, petits et grands*, who kept up  
 The cosmopolitan and soulless State  
 That into Paris recently had swept up  
 The sweepings of the earth into the great  
 Financial pool which had so slowly crept up  
 And swamped old Paris. Juliette could tell  
 A tale of wickedness surpassing well.

Her banker fiancé was a Brazilian  
 Upon his mother's side, and all his friends  
 (Not one of whom had less than half-a-million)  
 Had come from all the corners, all the ends  
 Of all the earth—Greek, Austrian, Sicilian,  
 Levantine, Russian, and on such depends  
 (Said Juliette) "*la destinée française,*  
*La gloire, l'honneur—rien ne leur apaise.*"

"*Rien ne leur apaise.*" They're like a flame  
 That rushes over heather and parched grass  
 Until the earth is but a blackened shame  
 O'er which a decent soul must fear to pass.  
 They know no country in their greedy game,  
 But love of country moves the nameless mass  
 Of men, and therefore love of country plays  
 Its part to blind the guileless public gaze.

She loathed the thought of marriage with her banker;  
 But she was rich, her *dot* too great to be  
 The portion of an ordinary ranker.  
 So love must never be her ecstasy.  
 Her ship must ever, ever ride at anchor  
 And never could she bravely put to sea.  
 "Dear Juliette," said Noel, "why not throw  
 The whole thing over and away we'll go."

She visited him on Wednesdays in his room,  
 And sometimes Sundays saw her lightly tripping  
 Across the bridge to shed her growing gloom  
 As down the slope of passion she went slipping.  
 Love without passion is a common doom,  
 But loveless passion is the sharpest whipping,  
 The keenest scourge that life can hold for those  
 Whose feelings can't be thrown off with their clothes.

Again a woman laid her country's soul  
 Before my hero. Loveless passion burned  
 His heart up till it was a lifeless coal,  
 Or seemed like one, what time he hardly learned  
 The desperation that can break the bowl  
 Of life when sin its wages has well earned  
 For blighting hopes and dragging men into  
 A state in which they know not what they do.

The soul of France was in this loveless passion,  
 This blind desire to scourge the flesh into  
 The love it could not know, the soul to lash on  
 Until it broke into a kind of dew,  
 To fall upon the flesh to heal the gash on  
 Which Death had licked his salt to keep it new  
 And fresh for more and greater violence  
 To satisfy the still unsated sense.

And this was France, this passion writhing under  
 The gorgeous world of Paris that New York  
 And London looked to as the greatest wonder  
 Created since the advent of King Stork,  
 Finance. This France would surely split asunder,  
 Thought Noel, as champagne will force its cork  
 Or burst its bottle if it's tapped too soon.  
 This France will find another marching tune,

Another Marseillaise. For Juliette,  
 In all the secret agony he guessed,  
 He found a way to help her to forget.  
 And sometimes almost she would have confessed  
 That loveless passion had her in its net.  
 But he was kind, his kindness all her rest,  
 And though her soul was blistered with her shame  
 To lie so much, she cried : " *Je t'aime ! Je t'aime !* "

*O ouvriers du monde, unissez-vous !*  
 O workers of the world, unite ! These words,  
 The challenge of the many to the few,  
 Began to pass among the sweating herds  
 Entrapped and sweated by the motley crew  
 Against whom Marx so eloquently girds  
 In his analysis, *Das Kapital*,  
 Of thimble-rigging international.

When Juliette was weary in her soul,  
 And blistered with her passion's loveless heat,  
 And Noel found himself in such a hole  
 As threatened e'en his judgment to unseat,  
 Then he would try the socialistic rôle  
 And take her to hear Jaurès for a treat.  
 That orator could make them both oblivious  
 Of all the torment of their thoughts lascivious.

For Noel there was more, but Juliette,  
 A daughter of the *ancien régime*,  
 Detested all the people. Her soul let  
 No common thought be parcel of her scheme  
 Of life. The mob was as a sea to fret  
 The fringes of her high-born lady's dream.  
 To fret in vain, since dreams they could not know  
 But simply live for eating as they go.

Her dream was still the dream of Notre Dame  
 And Chartres, and so she curled her lip  
 At Jaurès' dream of industry and calm  
 Co-operation, when the mob should strip  
 The trimmings off its life and then embalm  
 It in eternal peace. For her the whip  
 Of passion was a greater thing than peace,  
 And never would she have its blows to cease.

The martyrdom of France for her was law  
 As changeless as the seasons or the sun.  
 That France should have become the useful paw  
 Of monkeys like her fiancé was one  
 Of many signs that Heaven in its awe  
 Would hold the glass until the sands were run,  
 And France would suffer to sustain the glory  
 Which just redeems the sordid human story.

*O ouvriers du monde, unissez-vous !*  
 Unite for what ? To work and sleep and eat ?  
 To drink and talk and wive and breed and view  
 A world grown duller than its dullest street ?  
 To see it draped in grey and smoky hue,  
 All colour gone, all form lost in the heat  
 And grease and gas of working men grown fatter  
 Since they're convinced that only wages matter ?

*“Ah ! Bah ! À bas ! Ça pue ! Ça sent l’eau salée  
 Que l’on éreinte d’un éponge ! L’effort  
 Ne vaut la peine ! C’est pas un esprit malé  
 Ce Jaurès ! Non ! Il est aveugle au tort  
 Que fait le peuple depuis la grande rafale  
 De ’89 ! Que veut il donc ? La mort  
 Du peuple, et leur stupidité malsaine  
 Nous ronge l’amour, nous livre à la haine.”*

As Noel’s French was rather weak he could not  
 Quite understand the thoughts she thus gave vent.  
 He asked her to translate, but that she would not,  
 For only French could cover what she meant.  
 He liked his Jaurès, though he understood not  
 A quarter of his message’s content.  
 That Jaurès might be talking through his hat  
 Was nothing to the proletariat.

Now whether Jaurès through his hat was talking,  
 As Juliette so sceptically said,  
 A sprite of fever through the land went stalking  
 And Anarchy began to rear its head.  
 Though law and order constantly are baulking  
 That spirit, it still rises from the dead  
 And bids the living plunge to find salvation  
 Through hell on earth to ‘void the last damnation.

La France ! La France ! To hear a French crowd cry  
 Those words is terror to the heart. So deep,  
 So passionate, so tigerish, so sly  
 And cruel is it that the angels weep  
 To hear it, and to see the years go by  
 And France still Sisyphus upon the steep,  
 Still straining at the rock of human reason  
 Which for the rest is always out of season.

La France ! La France ! Deep from the belly came  
 The growling cry as Jaurès whipped the mass  
 Into a sense of all the creeping shame  
 That in the Third Republic came to pass  
 When it was sold to play the tricky game  
 Of High Finance. Jaurès held up the glass  
 Of candour to La France, La France gave tongue  
 To all the rage that from her soul was wrung.

The railways are a modern nation's guts.  
 A strike on them should do what Corday's knife  
 In Marat's did—cut through the shortest cuts  
 To freedom from the strangling of the life  
 Of millions when the coach of State in ruts  
 Is stuck and sense is lost in wordy strife.  
 The nation's instinct of self-preservation  
 Provoked a strike in icy desperation.

Paris stopped still ! The angry bourgeoisie  
 Called for a massacre of all the vile  
 Ungrateful wretches who refused to be  
 Deceived by all the arts which them beguile  
 (For bourgeois minds accept the knavery  
 That governs them if it is worth their while).  
 With each man's dossier upon their shelves  
 The strikers were called up to slay themselves.

Conscription gives each man two entities,  
 The shadow of a shadow he is made,  
 And when he kicks against his miseries  
 Then he is called to ply his soldier's trade  
 To stop himself from kicking. Then he sees  
 How futile is the game he bravely played.  
 La France ! La France ! The roar soon died away  
 Into the bleat for which the bourgeois pay.

“ You see,” said Juliette, “ the silly sheep  
 Are powerless. They’re herded in a pen  
 Locked with the pen. They cannot even keep  
 Their passion up to turn them into men.  
 It trickles out, and back the cowards creep,  
 To be each one a docile citizen.”  
 So this, thought Noel, is their *Liberté*,  
*Fraternité*, *Egalité* ! Ohé !

Eheu ! Alas ! This is democracy  
 As it is understood in France, where still  
 Men talk of Lafayette, but cannot see  
 That Freedom needs a forging of the will  
 Through more than physical adversity  
 Before it has the power to fulfil  
 Its prophecy made through the human heart  
 When first it learned of beauty through its Art.

More fiercely through disgust did Juliette  
 Cling to her Noel, though she clearly knew  
 That she could never, never hope to get  
 The love from him for which her hunger grew  
 Insatiable. She floundered in the net  
 With which some power had fished her from the blue  
 And sunlit rippled water of her youth  
 To feed on Noel’s bulging store of ruth.

He maddened her because he was too kind,  
 Too British for this very French affair.  
 To all her subtlety his soul was blind,  
 And when she wept he only kissed her hair  
 And did not weep nor knock upon his mind  
 As Frenchmen always do to please their fair.  
 He knew she suffered, but was keen and jolly  
 When she would have him sick and melancholy.

*“ Tu n'es pas froid, ni méchant, ni stupide,”*  
 She cried. *“ Mais tu es lourd, moral, trop gai,*  
*Insouciant, et tu ne sens la vide,*  
*La néant de l'amour. La Nuit de Mai*  
*Pour toi est toute la vie, la lune rigide*  
*T'enchanté, Nono.* Does eet alvays stay  
 Up there so cold, monotonous and bland  
 To make you that you cannot understand ?”

*“ Oui, oui,”* said Noel, who could hardly say  
 More in her language than plain Yes and No,  
*Eau chaude, and déjeuner, and poste and thé.*  
*“ Oui, oui,”* he said. *“ Je sais, you know, I know,*  
 For love like ours there is a price to pay.  
 But I am not like my friend Rubio,  
 Who pays in cash but loses all the joy  
 Of fearless love like ours which cannot cloy.”

They turned to art and set out to explore  
 The regions new discovered by Cézanne,  
 Who then enjoyed a posthumous furore  
 And was acclaimed as leader of the van  
 In modern art, whose aim was to restore  
 First principles as they were known to Man  
 Before his senses learned to cheat his mind  
 And make him both in sight and soul stone blind.

Matisse, Van Gogh, Gauguin and Picasso—  
 These were the names that ran from lip to lip,  
 And these the names that artful Rubio  
 Made note of as a wind to sail his ship  
 When, as he hoped to do, he'd make a show  
 In London Town, that needed some such whip  
 To keep its mind from going fast asleep  
 To dream of Dreadnoughts on the vasty deep.

For Rubio had not for nothing thrown  
 His fortunes in with Noel. He believed  
 His master would come surely to his own,  
 And something great through him would be achieved.  
 He even saw my Noel on the throne  
 Of England when the country was bereaved  
 Of Edward, and himself he saw as the  
 Great Jew to follow B. Disraeli.

The vulgar Paris of the Boulevards,  
 The Magasins, Montmartre, l'Étoile, the shows  
 Got up for tourists who from near and far  
 Come yearly to enjoy what they suppose  
 The daily pleasures of the city are—  
 These they ignored, although a tender nose  
 Cannot escape the pungent sickly smell  
 Which makes that Paris worse than I can tell.

Americans, said Oscar Wilde, all go  
 To Paris when they die if they are good.  
 And they are wise, for Paris life can show  
 A clearer glimpse of Heaven than a wood  
 In spring or than a mountain peak in snow  
 Or than the starry smile of babyhood.  
 The innocence of Paris you'll believe  
 If you will look at Puvis' Genevieve.

Most saintly is she as she gazes down  
 Upon her city, calm and sure. She dreams  
 Of the security of its renown  
 Through all the changes watered by its streams.  
 Not all its evil can call forth a frown  
 Upon her brow, for through its evil teems  
 The light that floods the city and its name,  
 And keeps its glory shining through its shame.

To die and go to Paris, there to meet  
 Great Abelard and Héloïse ; these two  
 Keep life with passion pure and very sweet ;  
 And François Villon, Ronsard and the true  
 Most noble Pascal, Voltaire in the street  
 That bears his name ; and Rabelais. Can you  
 Desire more, you Christians who pine  
 Somehow, somewhere to find a life divine ?

I cannot. There's Corneille and Molière,  
 And Racine, Diderot ; their names are light  
 Itself, the clear warm light that makes the air  
 A wine most potent to dispel the blight  
 Descended on the world from places where  
 Such men have never been, the appetite  
 For lies to check by forcing down the truth  
 On nations bent on poisoning their youth.

They forge th'unbroken chain of thought  
 Whereon are threaded all men's victories  
 In other fields, and triumphs nigh unsought,  
 Since they must follow in the wake of these  
 The pioneers, who in themselves have fought  
 The battles of humanity to please  
 No man or woman but the mighty spirit  
 Which all men should but few men do inherit.

Perceiving which, young Noel found he'd grown up.  
 The books he read with Juliette made plain  
 So many facts that he at last must own up,  
 And say that he must start his life again.  
 With her emetic he had simply thrown up  
 Just like a child, the things that gave him pain,  
 And like a child he turned to her to ease  
 The gnawing pain of seeing what he sees.

The moony light of youthful love had hid  
 So much in shadow that his thoughts were ghosts  
 To fit from gloom to gloom while he bestrid  
 With youthful joy the nigh unending hosts  
 Of men and women straining at the lid  
 That kept them in their hell where Satan roasts  
 Their bodies in the lewdness of desire  
 To make them ripe for his eternal fire.

This Roman ideology grew clearer  
 To Noel when with Juliette he heard  
 The music which to Paris had been dearer  
 Than even beauty in the written word.  
 For in it Frenchmen had come vastly nearer  
 The soul of ancient France since they incurred  
 In '70 the debt imposed by Bismarck,  
 Who took Alsace by way of leaving his mark.

It was as though the French had said to Prussia,  
 You're welcome to your mighty Emperors.  
 We've tried them. They're as out of date as Russia.  
 We've had enough of such conquistadors.  
 Now it shall be our steadfast aim to usher  
 The Modern Spirit down the corridors  
 Of Time. Your war will end by making you sick.  
 We'll take what you have now relinquished—music.

And as they said so it was done. In peace,  
 The peace past understanding, César Franck  
 Made music which seemed like another lease  
 Of hope, though none would listen and none thank  
 Him for it and his power to increase  
 The sum of human wealth, although a bank  
 Would look askance at such security,  
 Producing neither interest nor fee.

In music Juliette and Noel found  
 Some reconciliation of their aims,  
 At last, above the earth, some common ground  
 Where they could stand together 'mid the flames  
 Which they saw leaping everywhere around  
 Them as they found the love that tames  
 All selfish love and breaks the arrogance  
 With which it leads poor mortals such a dance.

Meeting that love, the love that Dante knew  
 For Beatrice, their eyes met and they smiled  
 A slow, sad smile to know that for them two  
 That love was not, and they had been beguiled  
 By charm, by passion and a longing for the new  
 Among the weary people who defiled  
 With their much boredom everything they touched,  
 And ever at new marvels snatched and clutched.

Le sport, le football Anglais, five-o'clock,  
 And aeroplanes and motor cars and racing,  
 Le cinema, le boxe, et l'équivoque  
 Angliche were introduced by way of gracing  
 The Entente Cordiale, that mighty rock  
 On which King Edward Europe's peace was basing,  
 With some support from Russia, as we'll see,  
 To make quite sure there'd be a victory.

But no one thought of war, except the men  
 Who make their living by it—they are many.  
 They think of nothing else, and make the pen  
 In peace time catch the ever-vagrant penny,  
 To pay for preparations for the *When*  
 Which some mistake will bring. Now are there any  
 Still left prepared most hotly to deny  
 That war was ever dreamed by an Ally?

War's fetid wind went rustling every day  
 Through Paris, and so stupefied the mind  
 That none could think and none could seek a way  
 By which the evil thing could be defined,  
 Tracked down, dissolved and kept from mortal clay.  
 Cold from the Russian steppes the bitter wind  
 Blew poison westward, till the Western soul  
 Grew sick and faint and lost from view its goal.

Le sport, le boxe, le cricket, le High-Life,  
 These filled the world for Juliette Dupuy  
 And the Brazilian whose jewelled wife  
 Her people had contracted she should be.  
 This bored her till her boredom like a knife  
 Cleft her poor heart, which ached in misery.  
 “*L'amour, l'amour, je suis une amoureuse*  
*Et dans mon âme le ver, le ver se creuse.*”

Poor Cleopatra, how she loved her asp !  
 To feel at last within her jewelled hand  
 The worm. At last to hold it in her grasp,  
 The gnawing pain to ease which Egypt's land  
 Was held within a hostile army's clasp,  
 Long agony made visible, no grand  
 And mighty thing, but cold, a slimy thing  
 That ate into her soul and broke its wing.

When wingless life has naught to give the soul  
 It aches for death, though still it hopes for healing,  
 Being all hope. Now Juliette took toll  
 Of what she was, her inmost self revealing  
 As slowly all her life began t'unroll  
 Before her eyes, no single phase concealing.  
 A lover—lost, a husband—lost, a lover,  
 Another yet that lover lost to cover—

That was her mother's life, the common lot,  
 Though whether it is worse than being tied  
 To one dull righteous man I'd rather not  
 Be called upon, dear Reader, to decide.  
 Nor am I sure but that the Hottentot  
 Is wiser when he buys with cows a bride  
 Whene'er he wants one, though I fiercely hate  
 That any man should buy a woman's fate.

Must women only live and think through men,  
 And to their dullness tune their sharper wits?  
 They must not and they shall not if my pen  
 Can only reach the level meet for its  
 Responsibility and bring again  
 The skill with which a proper woman fits  
 Her life and love together and goes free  
 By giving to her man his liberty.

A lover is conceived and must be born  
 Through her he loves. The miracle of birth  
 Must find its echo in the smiling morn  
 Of true love in a love-lit woman's mirth.  
 Without this all his life's a thing of scorn,  
 Just comic in its miserable dearth.  
 One moment with the loved one is enough  
 To turn a man into divinest stuff.

Ethereal, aerial his spirit,  
 No height too high for him to top on wings ;  
 No depth too deep for him then to inherit  
 Where joy bursts forth in still unnumbered springs.  
 No question here of morals or of merit,  
 For joy is always his whose passion sings  
 Its way through every snare and every danger  
 Set out to catch the fearless, reckless ranger.

That was the feeling which in Noel flickered  
As he reacted from his Juliette.

And when they quarrelled and she snarled and bickered  
He smiled and said there was one way to get  
Her freedom from her Bunker, who, well-liquored,  
Was kind to her as to a parlour pet,  
But in more sober moments made her see  
Her beauty was his private property.

'That way was simple. Noel said he'd wed.  
"Non, non!" said she. "Oui, oui!" said he. "Je vais  
Me marier chez toi." They were in bed,  
For it was on a stolen Saturday.  
They argued hotly, but she lived in dread  
Of what the Holy Mother Church would say,  
For though a most intelligent young woman  
Her thoughts upon this subject were sub-human.

She could *not* think of marriage and the sexes,  
Her thought had been laid down for her long since  
*Au couvent*, and the subject which perplexes  
So much of life could never make her wince  
From her unreason, for the Church indexes  
For adolescence where it should convince  
With argument and scientific fact  
Administered, of course, with taste and tact.

He talked so easily of breaking free,  
He who had been in Africa the child  
Of sun and air. To him his liberty  
Was like his breathing, sweet and undefiled  
By the contamination he could see  
Corrupting Europe. With her passion wild  
It seemed to him that Juliette could throw  
Discretion to the winds and jilt her beau.

But she was bound. Her mind could not consent  
 To what she did and yet she did it. That  
 Will always be the way of women bent  
 On marrying a soulless plutoerat  
 Without incurring hopeless banishment  
 From what her simpler sisters would be at.  
 She would not marry Noel, yet she would not  
 Desist from talking stuff he understood not.

So there was war, a desperate long duel  
 In which his British kindliness was worsted,  
 For she could be and he could not be cruel,  
 And for his cruelty she hotly thirsted,  
 As women do when they have lost the jewel  
 Of wedded love and seen their lives so bursted  
 That there's no hope of winning back again  
 The joy that is triumphant over pain.

Noel grew thin, emaciated, grey,  
 And Rubio, his courage in his hand,  
 Protested that his master should not pay  
 So dearly for his sojourn in this land  
 Where women far too often have their way  
 And eat up those who do not understand  
 The technique of the passionate affairs  
 Which take the place of love that lasts and wears.

The Jew in Rubio detested her,  
 The plutocratic Catholic who dragged  
 His master through this intrigue sinister  
 In which his joyous spirit paled and flagged,  
 And from the joyful eager messenger  
 Of Love transformed him to a soul that sagged  
 Just like a currant cake ill cooked and moist.  
 With her own petard was she shortly hoist.

The faithful Jew informed her fiancé  
 Of her too frequent tender assignations,  
 And the Brazilian upon a day  
 Rudely disturbed their gloomy meditations  
 Upon the fire that burns in mortal clay.  
 He did not waste much time on explanations,  
 But challenged there and then the Englishman  
 Who dared insult a French Brazilian.

To cleanse the lady's honour these two fought  
 Upon a day of springtime loveliness  
 In Fontainebleau, where Noel oft had sought  
 In lonely walks the spirit that can bless  
 The aching heart which has too fiercely fought  
 To keep its wonder in the throng and press.  
 "The heart's a wonder," cried the poet Synge  
 When with his satire he had had his fling.

In Fontainebleau the ghosts of kings and queens,  
 Great courtiers and courtesans are known  
 To keep their state beneath the budding green  
 When violets and celandine are blown.  
 They live and move in the enchanted sheen  
 That springtime round the woods has thrown.  
 They move like figures in a tapestry,  
 So softly, silently and gracefully.

They move and yet are still and seem to wait  
 For all their world to come to join their revelry,  
 For grosser mortals with their clumsy gait  
 To wake their royal stillness with their devilry,  
 As once they did in time when Royal State  
 Maintained its splendour with high chivalry.  
 But grosser mortals pass and do not know  
 The living greatness in the springtime glow.

The green buds burst and all things exquisite  
 That ever lived in immortality  
 Of joy join in the seasons as they flit  
 And bear things mortal off upon the sigh  
 Of autumn winds rejoicing to be quit  
 Of men who will not live before they die.  
 In Fontainebleau's enchantment Noel saw  
 Old Europe pass in mediæval awe.

The Roi Soleil and Richelieu and Madame  
 With lords and ladies flitted through the shimmer,  
 And old Saint-Simon noted down the Adam  
 Unchastened working in the golden glimmer  
 About these personages. Noel bade 'em  
 Stop, speak, but as the greenish light grew dimmer  
 They passed away from stillness into magic,  
 Beyond the region where this life is tragic.

But others came, as Marie Antoinette  
 And Louis XVI., with shepherds, silken-clad,  
 Who piped and danced a rural minuet  
 And made to be as peasants grossly glad,  
 Sweet mummery to help them to forget  
 The days of riot when they had run mad  
 And drunk too deeply of the heady wine,  
 The blood of France that nourishes the vine.

Transfigured, Noel stood in Fontainebleau.  
 The nightmare of his Paris days was swept  
 In this enchanted moment's morning glow  
 Into oblivion, and from his soul there crept,  
 Refreshed, renewed, the power again to know  
 The truth that for her chosen Life has kept.  
 These perfect moments are the flower of all.  
 Who misses them is damnèd in his fall.

He turned to Rubio and in amazement  
 "Did you not see?" he cried. "Did you not see?  
 The marching of those figures through the haze meant  
 That nothing dies if once its soul is free."  
 "You're ill," said Rubio, to whom his phrase meant  
 Exactly nothing. "You are ill, and we  
 Are in a sorry plight, for here's the other  
 And with him is Miss Juliette's young brother."

They came with swords and bandages and brandy,  
 A doctor, and their breakfast in a basket.  
 Their faces looked as though with sugar-candy  
 Their teeth were stuck. Each face was like a mask. It  
 Was an occasion ripe for Toby Shandy  
 And honest Trim, good Trim who held the casket  
 Of so much English humour in his head—  
 But English humour like so much is dead.

M. Dupuy and M. Garcia  
 De Garros de Fuego-Clément-If  
 Stood cold and still some twenty yards away  
 With Latin scowls upon the British thief,  
 What time the seconds argued the affray  
 Which now for Noel was beyond belief.  
 Why should he fight this man with many names?  
 It seemed to him the silliest of games.

Most foolish was it in the prime of morn,  
 When dewdrops hung upon the spider's thread,  
 When through the veil a gaping hole was torn  
 To show the quickness of the joyous dead  
 Who beckon on the legions yet unborn  
 To greater life than that from which thy fled:  
 Most foolish in the green of Fountainebleau  
 To think of death or making blood to flow.

If M. Garcia etcetera  
 Still loved his Julie, might he not forgive ?  
 That would be harder and more worthy a  
 Brazilian who might expect to live  
 With her in peace by such a gentle way  
 Of passing past offences through the sieve  
 Of Time's oblivion, but jealousy  
 Still keeps alive the forms of chivalry.

And gazing on the bold Brazilian  
 (For so he was, and hairy like an ape)  
 Our hero saw the cosmopolitan  
 As Hamlet saw the dread fantastic shape,  
 His father's ghost, revealing all the plan  
 To make graves yawn and Europe's churchyards gape.  
 A thing unclean, from whom had come the rust  
 To bring the soul of Juliette to the dust.

He saw his adversary as the worm  
 That gnawed at Fancy, Truth, Religion,  
 To make the captive souls of women squirm  
 And seek in vain their heart's companion.  
 Long since in London Noel had been firm  
 That he'd not go where so much good had gone.  
 And here in Fontainebleau's green haze  
 He'd seen the glory of old France ablaze.

“ You have a cold,” said Rubio. “ You must not  
 Take off your coat.” “ No, no, I never was  
 So well. . . . With sword shall be discussed not  
 The question whether stainlessly shall pass  
 A foolish woman taught at last to lust not,  
 But which of us shall lie dead on the grass.”  
 He spoke in English, but Dupuy had heard  
 And told his friend the risk he had incurred.

*“Cet Angliehe là est furieux et fou. . . .”*

*“J’espèrre qu’il ne se sait pas en escrime. . . .”*

The doctor thought of what he ought to do  
If one were killed. But Noel in a dream  
Imagined this another Waterloo  
To make this modern tyrant kick the beam,  
A tyrant who with hordes of wretched clerks  
Upon the conquest of the world embarks.

And Rubio was terrified and wept  
And rushed across to where the seconds stood.  
He saw how M. Garros-If had swept  
His enemy with hatred from the wood  
With one swift glance and towards him slowly crept,  
Correct in every fencer’s attitude.  
But Noel rushed, sprang, lunged and wildly thrust  
His sword in till it seemed as though it must

Impale the great apostle of Finance.  
But he was pricked. He fell and groaned a groan  
That must have wakened half the cocks in France  
And all the dogs, for they set up a moan  
That made the leaves upon the trees all dance,  
And turned my Noel’s beating heart to stone.  
When cruel Nature triumphs over feeling  
The heart comes near its inmost truth revealing.

The spell was broken. Trees were only trees,  
And dewdrops broke and spider threads were seen  
No more. The cold light of the sun ’gan freeze.  
The very violets and celandine,  
Whose modesty come shyly up to please,  
Were hidden now in the excessive green.  
At last young Noel found his voice and said :  
“Is he alive ?” The doctor bowed his head.

“O God!” cried Noel. “How came this to pass?  
 What demon lived in me to take sincerely  
 This little mimic conflict on the grass?  
 I seemed to see so much so very clearly,  
 Although I cannot tell you what it was.  
 If he is dead, then I have paid too dearly  
 For all I’ve learned in suffering and anguish  
 Of women who in loveless passion languish.

“A man may be an evil thing and yet  
 He is a man, too great a thing for men  
 To judge.” They took poor M. If and set  
 Him on his feet to totter through the glen  
 Towards the little low estaminet  
 Where they had left their taxi. Noel then  
 Was slightly reassured, and donned his coat—  
 The kindest man who ever cut a throat.

His conscience throbbed and, being conscientious—  
 Too conscientious—off he went to call  
 Upon his Juliette, from whose contentious  
 And very Gallic nature issued all  
 This pother, for had she been more abstentious  
 She never would have seen her Garros fall  
 A victim to the outworn code of honour  
 Whose consequences now descended on her.

Noel explained in honest British fashion  
 What he had done and what proposed to do.  
 He told her of the strange exalted passion  
 Which drove him on until he crashed right through  
 Convention’s ice to let his fury dash on  
 To kill the false and liberate the true.  
 But to his horror Juliette grew pale  
 And shuddered as he told his breathless tale.

She called him "*Assassin!*" as ladies cry  
 In dramas at the Porte St-Martin, and  
 She hugged her breast and clutched her hair, and dry  
 And glassy were her eyes, what time her stand  
 She took upon approved morality.  
 She curled her lip and bit her jewelled hand  
 And cried in scorn: "The English are all mad,  
 But you are worse. You're both insane and bad."

This was no time for heated argument,  
 No time for dialectical debate,  
 And Noel felt he had been too long pent  
 In passion which could ill conceal its hate.  
 If this is what upon the Continent  
 They make of love, he thought, then surely Fate  
 Must have some fearful vengeance up its sleeve,  
 For man you can but Fate you can't deceive.

Still more had Juliette Dupuy to say to him.  
 Ice-cold, she called him, and perfidious  
*Perfide Albion!* She'd given way to him  
 Although he was *au fond* ridiculous,  
 Like all the English. Then she said good-day to him,  
 As though there'd never been the slightest fuss.  
 "Leave me," she said, "to mourn my noble dead!"  
 Aghast at such hypocrisy, he fled.

What was it made these women fly into  
 His life like moths into a candle or  
 Like bats into a lighted window? Who  
 Can tell what women ever struggle for  
 Or why they wish their lovers to be true  
 When they are not themselves? The Toison d'or  
 Led Argonauts upon a voyage hapless,  
 And women in their voyages are mapless.

Or so it seemed to Noel, who was wrecked  
 In Paris as in London he had been,  
 Because he'd let its villainy infect  
 The youthful joy he'd won at seventeen,  
 When Love had made him one of the elect  
 To dominate the transitory scene  
 Where most of us are merely pawns or cogs  
 In the machine which human folly clogs.

He sought out Rubio and told him that  
 He'd broken with the lady. " *Gott sei Dank,*"  
 Said Rubio. " 'Twas I who put the fat  
 Into the fire. This woman's conduct stank  
 Of modern Paris, and I acted pat  
 Just in the nick of time before you sank,  
 Although perhaps you are a Salamander  
 In Europe's heat, you joyous Afrikander."

Then Rubio laid bare that he had news  
 Of Katje through a friend of his who taught  
 At the Conservatoire, and several clues  
 He had to help in finding whom they sought,  
 The love which is as healing as the dews  
 Of English April when the spring has taught  
 New life, new joys to break the winter weather  
 And bind in song all budding songs together.

In Paris? No. She had been there a while,  
 And all adored her for the liquid grace  
 In all her gestures, in her childish smile  
 That touched with gold the wisdom in her face.  
 And Noel groaned and felt he had been vile  
 To let his limbs be tethered to the pace  
 Of slavish women, dark and cold of heart,  
 Who lived upon the fever of the mart.

He had been young and over-chivalrous,  
 A bond-slave to the wreckage of his life,  
 And dazed by Europe with its ominous  
 Oppressive shadow looming up with strife.  
 He'd been a fool to let the women fuss  
 About him when at heart he had a wife.  
 And now in Paris he had killed a man,  
 If so you call a French Brazilian.

They packed. They sold his lease and furniture  
 And caught the night express to Basle, where runs  
 The River Rhine, whose nymphs were glad, I'm sure,  
 To see my Noel come among the Huns.  
 They sang their glee to see so young and pure  
 A spirit come to soar above the guns  
 With which the Germans learned to do their thinking  
 From Bismarck, who could slaughter without blinking.

*Urvater Rhein!* You growled a welcome too  
 As Noel crossed the frontier and said  
 Farewell to France and *Herzensgruss* to you  
 In whom there live so many noble dead.  
*Urvater Rhein*, if men would only woo  
 Your spirit more you would not run so red  
 As you have done these many generations  
 Since on your banks were lined the foolish nations.

Low lay the clouds upon the mountain ranges  
 As Noel and his Jew in their hotel  
 Surveyed the lovely scene that never changes  
 While change in men evolves a changing Hell.  
 When Heaven is so near what seems so strange is  
 That men can't make the effort to be well  
 And sane and comradely and kind enough  
 To take the smooth and tolerate the rough.

And here we leave our Quixote in reaction  
 On neutral ground against the tortured France  
 In which he'd found so little satisfaction  
 In probing underneath her elegance.  
 We let him breathe at ease before the action  
 Of this our epic makes him once more dance  
 Before the rising waves of Europe's storm  
 Destroys its life and shatters its old form.

We leave him gazing at the mountain peaks  
 And musing with the Rhine, who shares his deep  
 And ancient wisdom with the soul that speaks  
 Its knowledge out and not a thought will keep  
 Sealed up in silence, but its inmost seeks  
 And brings it forth, not fearing for to weep  
 Or laugh in such assuring company  
 As Father Rhine with wisdom running free.

Wise are the mountains, wise the tender snows  
 That veil their rising summits from the sun.  
 And wise the dandelion and the rose,  
 The gentian blue as eyes lit up with fun  
 In babyhood. And wise the stream that flows  
 From all this wisdom till its tale is done  
 And lost in the unfathomed wisdom of the ocean  
 So deep and still beneath its wind-blown motion.

Wise are all these! How foolish then are men  
 With so much show maintaining all their folly!  
 A poet should write wisdom with his pen.  
 But where to find it? There's the melancholy  
 Inexorable fact, that thwarts me when  
 I'd like to be just musical and jolly.  
 The wisdom of a poet cannot thrive  
 When folly in his fellows is alive.

Still, Muse, my dear, we'll take our promised flight  
 Above the mountains, higher than the stars,  
 For we could fly when Mr Wilbur Wright  
 Was floundering and getting full of scars.  
 We'll fly beyond the source of day and night,  
 And leave my fellows to the bolts and bars  
 Which they so love that they will fight and slay  
 Rather than walk out freely in the day.

Men won't be free, because they are afraid  
 Of Freedom's high responsibility,  
 And of the fateful wages which are paid  
 For sin well sinned and joy enjoyed with glee.  
 But you and I, my Muse, were never made  
 To be imprisoned in such misery.  
 The perfume of a violet can give  
 Our souls the joy on which they fiercely live.

High is our flight in ecstasy to wake  
 Delight to be consumèd by the waves  
 Of music raging from the gods to break  
 The thickened crust upon a world of slaves  
 Who will not hear the bird upon the brake  
 Much less the windy music from the caves  
 Of Time, where songs are born but lose their way  
 Among the stars that smile on mortal clay.

They smile because they see this wretched Earth  
 As just a little twinkler like themselves.  
 If they could see the miserable dearth  
 Of joy with which poor Adam digs and delves  
 And Eve dries up his failing source of mirth,  
 What time the fruit of all his work she shelves,  
 They'd look away and never shine again  
 And nothing do to ease our mortal pain.

God rest you, Noel, here in Switzerland.  
 Wait in the land of waiters till I feel  
 That I am strong enough to try my hand  
 Upon the folk who make the iron heel  
 Just bearable (*Hoch! Hoch! Dem Vaterland*)  
 With beer and sausage and kultur, the meal  
 Which every German gorges every day  
 In gratitude to Berlin on the Spree.

Consider Switzerland, and Thomas Cook  
 (A greater than the Captain), Henry Lunn,  
 And William Tell—three names upon the Book  
 Of Fame engraved until the tale is done.  
 All helped to make this little sheltered nook  
 A place to which the persecuted run.  
 And here by the pellucid Lake Geneva  
 Young Noel met with exiles from the Neva.

Here I must pause to doff my hat and take  
 My grateful heart out from my panting breast  
 That can no longer hold it, while I make  
 My tribute to Voltaire, whose exile blest  
 The rather chromolithographic lake,  
 Where Rousseau dreamed and was the Muses' guest.  
 What can I say? What need I say indeed?  
 The man was sixty when he wrote *Candide*.

I'll ask the old man's ghost if he would mind  
 My introducing to his *Ingénu*  
 My Noel, for they're heroes of one kind,  
 Who unconcerned do what they want to do  
 And do not understand the rules that bind  
 Such timid halting folk as me and you.  
 The old man said: "All right, but go ahead  
 And let me be to try to save the dead

“ From the illusion which so utterly destroyed  
 Their life on earth, where death was all their truth  
 And nothing else by beauty was enjoyed,  
 And old age tried to force its death on youth.  
 When I still walked in flesh I was employed  
 In crying havoc on such lack of youth.”  
 The Ingénu and Noel were delighted  
 To meet each other in this place benighted.

For Rubio had met a Russian friend,  
 A Jew from Spital Square who'd killed his man  
 Good-humouredly in Moscow to defend  
 The Revolution which he'd hoped would pan  
 Out like the French, a broken world to mend.  
 He'd blown to dust a great Cauasian  
 Who knew too much of what Young Russians harp on,  
 And also had corrupted Father Gapon.

“ My master's killed a rich financier  
 In Paris ! ” Rubio declared with glee.  
 “ I see th'affair has made a little stir  
 And famous now is Juliette Dupuy.  
 But no one even knows the name of her  
 Inamorata. All because of me.  
 I blew the gaff because I had to bust  
 The woman who abused my master's trust.”

“ *Da, da, da, da, da, da, da, da, da !* ”  
 Exclaimed the Russian. “ That was very good.  
 The French financee the Tsar, whose opera  
 Is all he has to show for Russian blood  
 Poured out to pay his interest. Ah ! ha !  
 A French capitalist ! Destroy the brood  
 Who carry on as though the Corsican  
 Were not *démodé* by the Marxian

“Apostolate, of whom I and my friends,  
 Who’ve also killed their man, are humble members,  
 All pledged to see that to its farthest ends  
 Europe shall burn and crumble into embers.  
 It’s bound to come ; how soon of course depends  
 On men like us, whose bitterest Decembers  
 Yet hold the germ of spring to blossom forth  
 As soon it will up in the blood-soaked north.

“The workers of the world have naught to lose  
 Except their chains. Class-consciousness will grow  
 Until at last the workers will refuse  
 To labour on, while idle spendthrifts throw  
 Their work away in striving to amuse  
 Themselves. . . .” “Da, da. Yes, yes,” said Rubio,  
 Who knew all that and so refused to let  
 His friend explain the Marxiste alphabet.

The lamentable death of M. If  
 Was a credential here, and Noel found  
 Among these people kindness past belief,  
 Though tempered somewhat with their not quite sound  
 Mentality, which made them see a thief  
 In every man who could produce a pound  
 At will, for they, poor things, had not a bean  
 With which to win the vision they had seen.

Long-haired the men, short-haired the women, who  
 Talked less but felt the more, and ghostly glared  
 Upon the world whose crimes they would review  
 At any length to anyone who cared.  
 In Switzerland they’d nothing else to do.  
 So long they’d been in exile, all prepared  
 For Revolution which they knew would come  
 To clear the lake of Europe of its scum.

A Dostoieffsky novel is not more  
 Loquacious than a Russian who will talk,  
 As other men get drunk, to help restore  
 Their courage to surmount the ills that baulk  
 Their generous desires. And here a score  
 Of Russians talked until they could not walk.  
 In cafés nightly talked and talked until  
 Some kindly person came to pay the bill.

When Noel paid their bill they talked again  
 For five days at a stretch to such a hearer,  
 An Afrikander innocent and plain  
 Of thought, to whom their tale was a Chimera,  
 A mystic myth that hurt his puzzled brain  
 So that he sometimes asked them to be clearer.  
 And then they talked, expecting him to pay  
 For what they ate, what time they had their say.

He paid, and on they rushed, their eyes imploring  
 Him with his youthful joy to take the lead,  
 And wake poor Europe from its age-long snoring,  
 Drugged with a most misapprehended creed.  
 "We Russians find your Europe very boring,  
 We cannot find in it the thing we need.  
 We want to be good Europeans, but  
 The door on Goethe's Europe has been shut.

"What can we do we Russians who are not  
 A nation but a congerie of races?  
 We want a culture, but it must be HOT,  
 And we don't want the Yellow man's embraces.  
*Au contraire*, we would let ourselves be shot  
 Rather than woo this present Europe's graces.  
 Quite definitely we will not be Prussian,  
 But there is nothing in us purely Russian.

.. We sit in cafés till we're paralysed.  
 There's nothing we can do except in print,  
 And that in Russia's censored and revised  
 Until it hardly gives a single hint  
 Of what we really mean. And we have sized  
 The situation up so often that no glint  
 Of practical good sense appears in what  
 We say and say again in this dull spot."

And Noel felt their gloom begin to creep  
 Into his bones, until he could not stir  
 Or feel or act, and everything in sleep  
 Was sunk except his brain, and that would whir  
 Like a machine with no man there to keep  
 It clean, or to prevent the fluffy fur  
 Of dust and rust that gathered in upon it,  
 And choked the thought the Russians had laid on it.

Most horrible! His mortal eye could see  
 Mont Blanc and nothing else, what time the eye  
 Of his immortal soul, which used to be  
 So keen that it was never bounded by  
 Things human, but could see eternity  
 Through all the farce played out in misery  
 Which men call Life, saw nothing but the steppes  
 Of Russian talk from Marxiste demireps.

They'd been in prison. Prison was their mind,  
 As Companies and Trusts are all the thought  
 Of Western Europe. Prison still could bind  
 Their souls as surely as if they had bought  
 Machines to do the work they owed mankind.  
 In Prison they had found the thing they sought,  
 What all men seek in modern life, a trick  
 With which to snuff their candle's too long wick.

A prison's a machine with which to give  
 Unsocial men some social sense, and make  
 Them realise they have no right to live  
 Except for some community's dear sake.  
 In modern life no man's a fugitive.  
 There's no escape, and every man must take  
 The plunge and let machinery defame  
 His brains until his manhood's but a name.

Successful men wreak havoc with their deeds,  
 With words the unsuccessful drench their lives.  
 Mankind is one huge belly whose gross needs  
 Must be supplied, though nothing lovely thrives,  
 And everything that lives for beauty bleeds,  
 And Freedom pines in manacles and gyves.  
 Mankind is one huge belly that devours  
 Love, lovers and their delicatest flowers.

Hotels and prisons ! What a world ! Escape ?  
 "I must escape," thought Noel, and he fled  
 To ease his mind of the fantastic shape  
 Assumed by Man since human souls were dead,  
 While animate machines committed rape  
 Upon Society so grievously misled.  
 Hotels and prisons ! All to fill these two  
 Were poor and rich, the many and the few.

Up to the mountains Noel fled alone.  
 Alone ! To be alone, upon the mountains bare,  
 To touch the cold and unrelenting stone,  
 The solid stone, to breathe the eager air.  
 Here on the mountains life seemed all his own,  
 A step upon the never-ending stair  
 That leads to God, upon whose knees are laid  
 The souls of these whose love was not afraid.

How beautiful upon the mountains are  
 The feet of them that bring glad tidings! None  
 Found Noel on Mont Blanc though near and far  
 He gazed in childish expectation.  
 None save himself the virgin snow did mar,  
 And he was forced to see that One is One  
 And all alone and ever more shall be so.  
 We all must reap in time the tares that we sow.

And Noel reaped his now as he perceived  
 No feet upon the mountains which became  
 A challenge to himself who vainly grieved  
 To see so little light come from the flame  
 Of passion's joy in which he had believed.  
 He reaped his tares in agony and shame,  
 Then piled them up and burned them with the fire  
 Of purer joy and still untouched desire.

How comforting the silence and the snow  
 Away from men who act and live and talk,  
 But never think that always what they know  
 And what they do are different as chalk  
 From cheese! How comforting to throw  
 All social thought aside and freely walk  
 Full of the healing air with sunlight thrown  
 From snow and sky! How good to be alone!

Though men build cities and create a world,  
 Still to the earth Man's love must ever turn,  
 Else in a prison is his spirit curled:  
 His love and all it makes its own must burn,  
 Must be destroyed and into chaos whirled.  
 Only from Earth can human passion learn  
 Creation and the power to increase  
 The joys wherewith the soul can live at peace.

Here in the mountains moulded by the sun  
 New earth is made and carried by the rivers  
 Which to the sea from snowy caverns run.  
 So too the soul that out of selfhood shivers  
 Pours down its joy in being fiercely One  
 And all alone to animate the livers  
 In cities, cramped by law, who need this Earth  
 Before they can bring any joy to birth.

But Noel was too young for long reflection ;  
 He swiftly knew the thing he wished and plunged  
 And never wasted time in mere dejection.  
 Past sorrows from his soul were quickly sponged,  
 And naught was left for intimate dissection.  
 So down he flew and into life he lunged,  
 Forgetful of the hurts that it had yielded  
 Him when his sword of youth he'd wielded.

He held it now more firmly, and it shone  
 And gleamed like Arthur's sword Excalibur.  
 "Come, Rubio!" he said, "let us begone.  
 Let's go where life's alive and there's a stir  
 Of hope in men of more than putting on  
 A mental attitude, as they prefer,  
 To face the Nothing which contains the whole  
 Of human life—except the human soul."

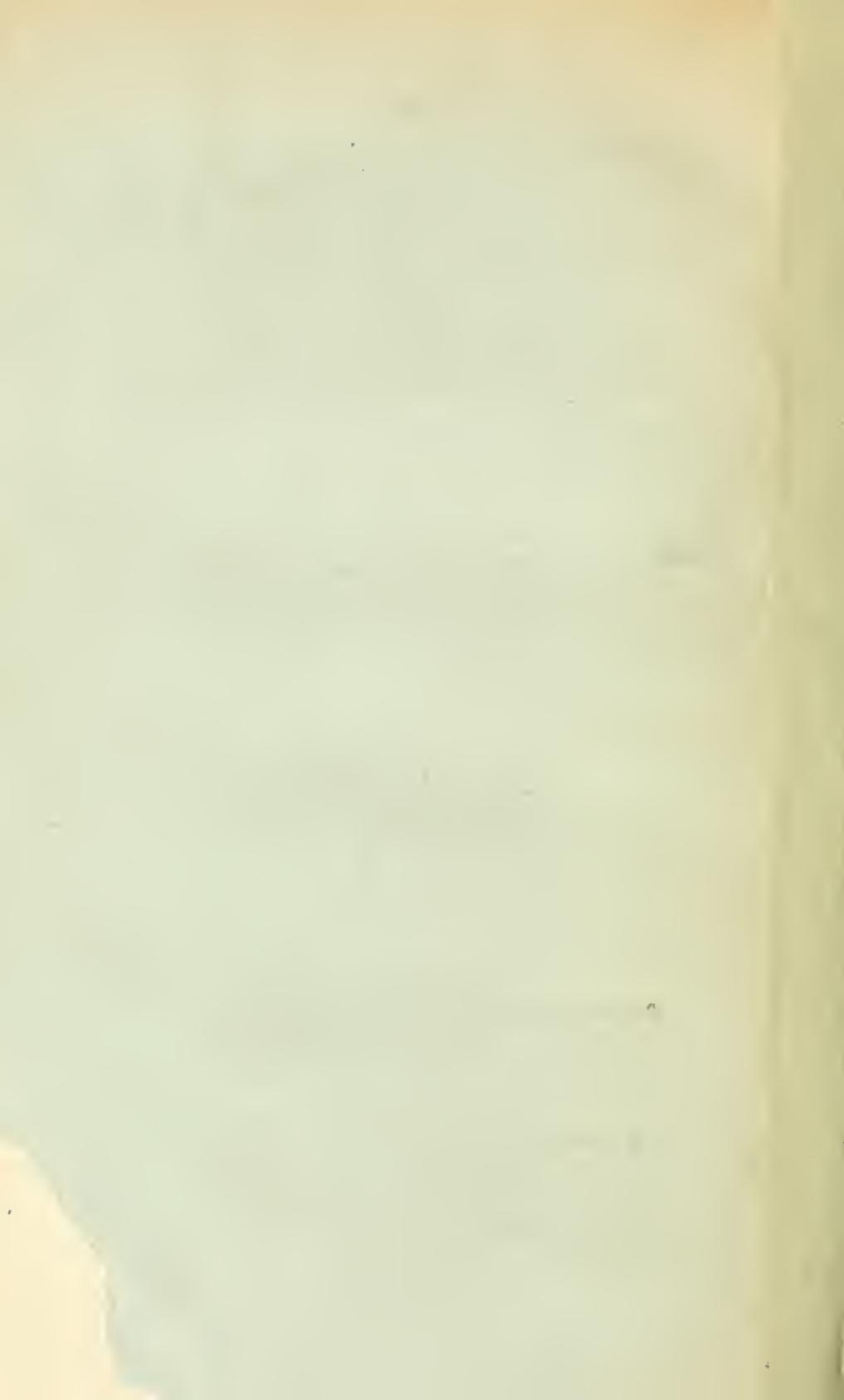
"The human soul," said Rubio, "has left  
 The human race. Its job is gone. Its work  
 Is now done by machinery which deft  
 And nimble artisans attend, who shirk  
 As much as possible, since they're bereft  
 Of the old pride which freed them from the irk  
 Of ceaseless toil. They toil unceasingly  
 To help machines to breed machinery.

And Noel laughed. Not while the mountains stand,  
Not while the snows in rivers reach the sea,  
Not while the roses blossom in the land,  
Not while the birds maintain their minstrelsy,  
Not while the lover holds his loved one's hand,  
Not while true lovers take in ecstasy  
Their more than Freedom, can the soul of Man  
Be driven out by any social plan.

For men are singers sweeter far than all  
The melody of field and wood and brake.  
The soul of Man in song will ever call,  
And men will answer though they pine and ache  
And go so blindly, stumble on and fall  
Into a sleep so fast that none can wake  
Their senses to the slow and sly disaster  
That creeps upon them, all their hopes to master.

Men sing as children smile because they know  
The light that in them lives and radiance  
Outpours for everything that seems to show  
Its light to them in happy, happy chance.  
Men sing and laugh, aye, even when they go  
Beneath the shadow of Death's countenance.  
They sing because it is not worth the trouble  
To take quite seriously this life's bubble.





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